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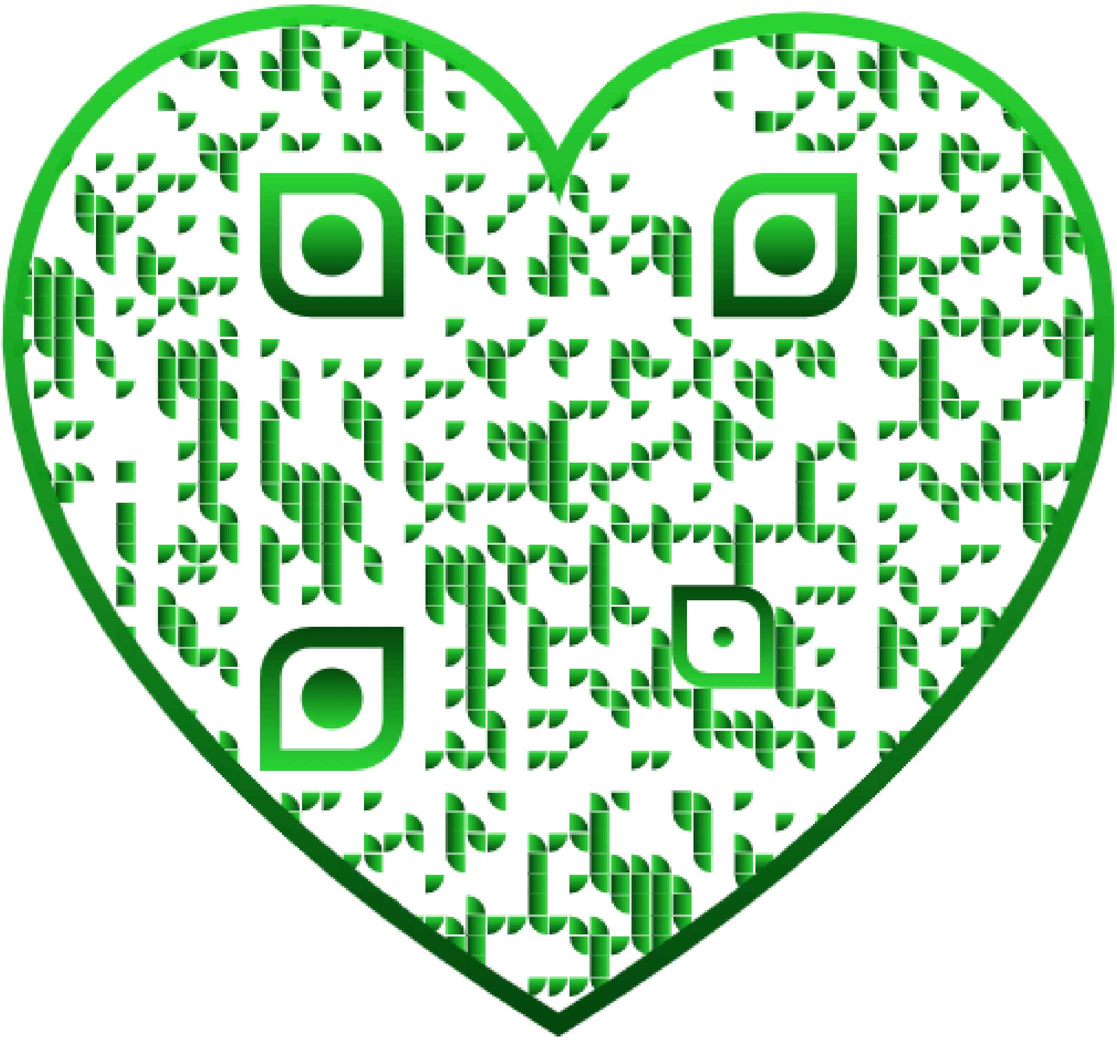

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COMMENT

AUTOCAR AWARDS 2025: TOP TALENT AND BEST CARS

The recipient of this year's Issigonis Trophy, Autocar's most prestigious award, is Ho Sung Song, Kia's CEO. A brand already firmly risen, Kia has been taken on a further upward trajectory with impressive impetus by Song since he took on the role five years ago.

That success has been propelled by hugely desirable vehicles in key segments, a strong design ethos and savvy business practices, such as highly effective inventory management that ensures every car globally is sold to order.

Another key strategy has been Song's decision to continue offering two line-ups, contrary to many rivals, because he wants Kia to continue "a full line-up of ICE and EV to allow flexibility and cover different customer requirements". It's a pragmatic approach: why tie yourself in knots with end dates to ICE, or otherwise, in such a fast-changing market?

Song has also shown – unlike many car makers that have tried to push beyond the volume market – that mainstream cars can still be done, and made truly desirable too.

Song leads a formidable roster of Autocar Awards 2025 winners, who include Aston Martin boss Lawrence Stroll, Fiat design chief François Leboine and the McLaren Formula 1 team. All our winners demonstrate passion, know-how and innovation and, thrillingly, the results are cars we can all enjoy.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

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V12 duel: Aston vs Ferrari

Prepare your ears and join Matt Prior as he pits the epic Vanquish against the 12Cilindri on some of Scotland's finest driving roads.

Meet Kia's design boss

From his office in Korea, Karim Habib shares the secrets of Kia's design success with Autocar editor Mark Tisshaw on our pod.

Snapping wild off-roaders

Max Edleston straps a video camera to his stills camera to give you a rare behind-the-scenes POV of a fast 4x4s photoshoot.

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"This is my boyfriend, and he takes up all my spare time" p89

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GOT A STORY Email our news editor
will.rimell@haymarket.com

GOLF GTI MARKS 50TH WITH POTENT HARDCORE SPECIAL

VW's new GTI Edition 50 packs 321bhp and is tuned for rapid track pace

Volkswagen has revealed the new Golf GTI Edition 50 as the most powerful and "the most dynamically adept" in the model's 50-year history.

The special hot hatch has been unveiled as part of the golden jubilee celebrations for the iconic GTI badge – first introduced on the Golf GTI in 1975 and standing for Grand Touring Injection.

It builds on the existing Mk8.5 car but uses a more powerful iteration of VW's turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder EA888 petrol engine, which now delivers 321bhp and 310lb ft.

That represents a 60bhp and 37lb ft hike over the standard Golf GTI and a 25bhp and 15lb ft increase over the more track-focused GTI Clubsport. While the four-wheel-drive Golf R 20 Years retains a small power advantage, at 328bhp, the special GTI matches that car's torque output.

The extra reserves help the Edition 50 improve on the GTI Clubsport's straight-line performance, with 0-62mph taking 5.5sec (down 0.1sec) and 0-124mph in 16.9sec (down 0.4sec). This brings it closer to rivals such as the Honda Civic Type R (0-62mph in 5.4sec). Top speed is again limited to 168mph.

However, engineers behind the project insist the focus wasn't on raw output. "It is also the most capable on the track," said chassis development boss Lars Frömmig. "Performance is about much more than just power."

It has Warmenau wheels, bespoke semi-slicks and lower, tuned suspension

The foundation for the Edition 50's chassis revisions is a reworked version of the GTI's standard MacPherson-strut front and multi-link rear suspension, which is now 20mm lower than the GTI and 5mm lower than the GTI Clubsport.

Key changes include revised spring and damper rates and significantly increased negative front camber, which is now around -2.0deg. This is achieved through stiffer upper suspension mounts, modified wheel carriers and uprated bushings in the

> **"There's less roll and a more progressive build-up of lateral forces. We're absolutely serious about performance in this car"**

GTI Edition 50 has lapped the 'Ring quicker than any other production VW

	GOLF GTI CLUBSPORT	GOLF R 20 YEARS	GOLF GTI EDITION 50
Price	£42,155	£48,095	£45,000 (est)
Power	296bhp	328bhp	321bhp
Torque	295lb ft	310lb ft	310lb ft
0-62mph	5.6sec	4.6sec	5.5sec
0-124mph	17.3sec	16.4sec	16.9sec

lower control arms.

At the rear, the Edition 50 reintroduces a twin-attachment track rod – reminiscent of the Mk7 GTI – and new wheel carrier geometry for greater lateral stiffness and toe stability under load, particularly in fast direction changes.

VW has also recalibrated the electromechanical steering, DCC (Dynamic Chassis Control) and VDM (Vehicle Dynamics Manager) to suit the Edition 50's more aggressive hardware set-up.

Complementing the chassis upgrades are 235/35 R19 Bridgestone Potenza Race semi-slick tyres, developed specifically for this car. They are 1.2kg lighter per tyre than previous-generation Potenza Races and paired with 19in forged aluminium Warmenau wheels.

The tyre and wheel combination alone is said to reduce unsprung mass by more than 2kg per corner compared with the Clubsport's cast wheels and standard rubber – a key factor in improving steering response, says Frömmig. A further 11kg can be shed with the optional Akrapovic titanium exhaust system.

Beyond weight, the semi-slicks improve grip in both dry and wet conditions and increase sidewall stiffness for better support under load – all aimed at greater lap-time consistency and real-world drivability.

According to Frömmig, the Edition 50 turns in more decisively and offers significantly greater body control than the existing GTI variants. He said: "There's less roll and a more progressive build-up of lateral force. We're absolutely serious about performance in this car."

The Edition 50 has already made its mark with a 7min 46.13sec lap of the Nürburgring Nordschleife – the fastest time recorded by any production VW, including the four-wheel-drive Golf R 20 Years.

The Edition 50 retains the same exterior styling as the GTI Clubsport but with subtle giveaways such as black graphics on the lower parts of the doors, '50' decals on the roof spoiler and black tailpipes.

VW has not disclosed how much the Edition 50 will cost or how many units will be built, but it is understood to be a limited-run model. UK order books are due to open towards the end of this year, with first right-hand-drive deliveries in early 2026.

GREG KABLE

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Despite its focused driving remit, it remains a usable Golf GTI inside

DESIGN RETHINK FOR ID 3 AND ID 4 – AGAIN

The ID 3 and ID 4 will be extensively updated for a second time to bring them visually in line with the upcoming ID 2 – as well as reintroducing physical controls inside.

Talking to Autocar, VW technical development boss Kai Grünitz said the two models will adopt the new design language first introduced on the 2023 ID 2all concept to give them "a family resemblance to the ID 2" and a "lower and squatter stance".

The facelifted ID 3 and ID 4 will also receive fully revised interiors with a new dashboard and user interface. Changes include a return to physical buttons and knobs in place of digital display-based functions and the controversial slider element, a move hinted at on the ID 2all.

"We're going to bring back a round knob for the volume control," an insider said. "If you develop something that works – and it has worked for years – there's no reason to replace it."

The facelifted ID 3 is scheduled to be revealed in the second quarter of next year and the ID 4 later in 2026.

BENTLEY'S FIRST EV IS SLEEK SUV WITH 1000BHP PROMISE

Lower-riding SUV has 'authentic' Bentley feel; 1000bhp variant will follow

Bentley's debut electric car will be a low-slung, sleek SUV that will bring something new to the EV class, according to the firm's R&D chief, who has given Autocar new details of what to expect from the long-awaited EV.

Matthias Rabe's comments come as the British car maker prepares to put heavily clad prototypes onto the roads around its Crewe headquarters for the first time, ahead of a planned 2026 launch.

Speaking at the launch of the Bentayga Speed in the US, Rabe confirmed that the EV's roofline will sit lower than the Bentayga's and the length of its wheelbase will be between that car's regular and extended-wheelbase variants.

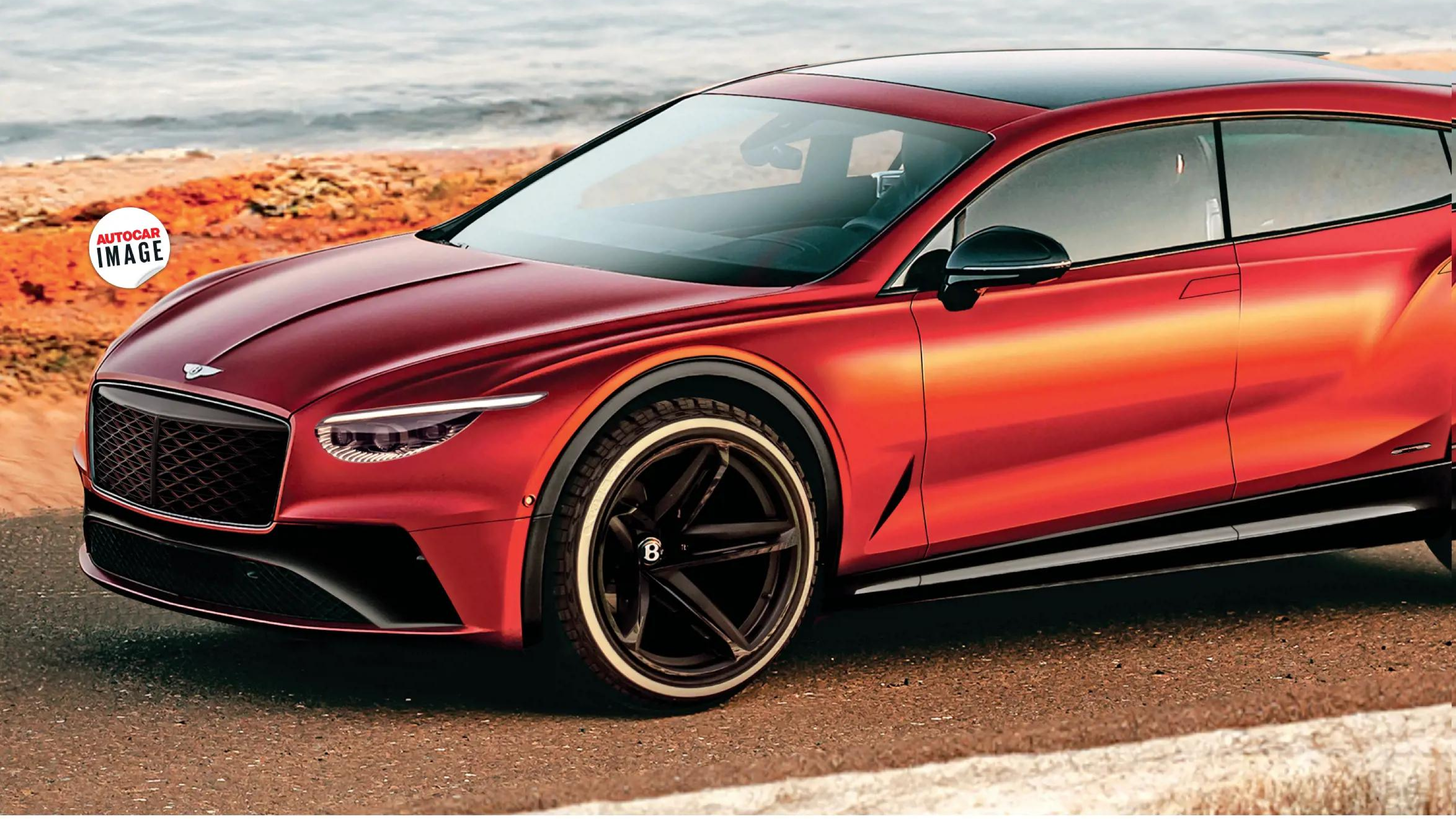
As a result, the car – billed as a "luxury urban SUV" – ought to cut a comparatively sleek aesthetic compared with the Bentayga. A marginally lower ride height is also expected, although the D-pillar will still have a somewhat upright angle to it because Bentley's EV is no coupé-style SUV.

Bentayga will continue on sale alongside the "luxury urban SUV" EV

Exactly how it will drive is still under wraps, but Rabe said Bentley was able to work with Porsche and Audi on parent Volkswagen Group's Premium Platform Electric – currently used by the Audi Q6 E-tron and Porsche Macan Electric – and the brand was party to discussions on the engineering scope from the earliest stages.

The same was true for the most recent Flying Spur, whose Porsche Panamera-shared platform had significant input from Bentley during the development phase, to the tangible benefit of the finished product.

In terms of the car's character, Bentley is aware that the model will be an entirely new proposition for existing customers. However, Rabe says the goal



ELLESMERE GETS NEW BOSS

Stellantis has appointed a new plant director at its Ellesmere Port factory. Fernando Andreu, head of the now-closed Luton plant, takes over from Autocar Award winner Diane Miller (p44).

VITARA EV DIPS UNDER £30K

The electric Suzuki Vitara will go on sale in July priced from £29,999. The base 2WD Motion has a 49kWh battery for 214 miles of range. Other models use a 61kWh pack and the flagship is the £37,799 4WD Ultra.

is to instil a recognisable Bentley feel into the handling and steering, and to establish "a connection to the car in an authentic way" through the driving controls.

The car shouldn't feel "like a simulator or games console", said Rabe, and while he applauds the innovations Hyundai made with its surprisingly realistic simulated gearshift setting in the Ioniq 5 N, the Bentley EV won't resort to synthetic trickery on such a broad scale. He said sound will be particularly important and will offer something new in the class.

Asked whether a four-figure power output was on the cards, former Cupra boss Rabe responded: "Not at first." To date, the most powerful series-production Bentley is the current Continental GT plug-in hybrid, with 771bhp. Rabe's comment suggests the new EV will one day easily exceed that.

RICHARD LANE

> "Prototypes will soon hit the roads around Crewe, ahead of a 2026 launch"

HARDCORE CONTINENTAL GT ON THE WAY

SPY SHOTS

Bentley is also preparing a new range-topper for its Continental GT line-up – potentially even creating an indirect successor to the Supersports of 2013.

Speaking to Autocar, Bentley R&D chief Matthias Rabe didn't rule out the possibility of transplanting the 641bhp 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 powertrain from the Bentayga Speed (First Drives, 18 June) into the Continental GT.

New test mules photographed this month provided further evidence and suggest that the car will be positioned as something more extreme than the current car, rather than a model that guns to be the most powerful Continental in the range. The fourth-generation Continental – which was launched last year – exclusively uses a plug-in hybrid powertrain and, in its most powerful Speed guise, puts out a lofty 771bhp.

Compared with that car, these prototypes are fitted with a fixed rear spoiler and extra front aero, showing the track and lap-time focus of the model. There is also a new tailpipe design, which replaces Bentley's traditional oval pipes with twin exhausts on either side.

Further details of the car remain under wraps but, like the Supersports predecessor, it is likely to be available in only limited numbers.

MITSUBISHI KEEN ON UK COMEBACK WITH NEW LINE-UP

MITSUBISHI WANTS TO return to the UK as part of a broader strategy to rebuild its business in Europe, the brand's Europe head told Autocar.

The Japanese car maker left the UK in 2021 amid a Covid-led sales collapse that forced a rethink across its global markets, including Europe.

Since then, Mitsubishi has returned to most of its former European markets with the aid of new models sourced from Alliance partner Renault.

Now, Mitsubishi wants to include the UK in that plan. "If you look at the potential and size of the market, it's our preferred route to go back," said Frank Krol, CEO of Mitsubishi Motors Europe. "But we need to have the right product line-up."

Mitsubishi's preferred models for a UK return include the replacement for the Outlander PHEV and incoming, Renault-built, Scenic-twinned electric SUV, said Krol.

Both models would showcase the values of the brand better than the current Renault-sourced line-up, such as the Clio-based Colt. The existing models have helped the brand re-establish itself amid changing regulations but are little differentiated from the donor Renault cars.

Mitsubishi is still recognised as a brand in the UK, says Krol – but the company has to move fairly quickly to capitalise on that. "It is not preferred to have an extremely long period without any sales presence," said Krol. "That's something we would need to consider."

Clio-based Colt has helped Mitsubishi regain a foothold in Europe

US-UK TARIFF DEAL SIGNED

US president Donald Trump and UK prime minister Keir Starmer have signed a deal that rubber-stamps the new vehicle import levy of 10%. The first 100,000 UK-made vehicles to enter the US will incur the tariff, with any additional ones to be taxed 25% in line with most other nations. Starmer called it "a very important day".

G7 2025 KANANASKIS
G7

SKODA TRIES NEW FIBRE DIET

Skoda has replaced carbonfibre with a new material for its Enyaq RS Race concept – and it could be used on production cars. Built with fibres from the flax plant, the parts are lightweight and sustainable.

LANDIE'S CAMEL CHAMELEON

The new Defender Trophy Edition is an expedition-ready variant that references Land Rover's Camel Trophy event. From £89,810, it brings yellow or green paint and a £4995 pack adds kit such as a snorkel.

GETTY IMAGES

DE MEO LEAVES RENAULT GROUP FOR LUXURY FIRM

CEO is departing after five years and an internal successor looks likely

Luca de Meo is stepping down as CEO of the Renault Group after five years and will take charge at Kering, the French company that owns luxury goods brands such as Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent.

The Italian joined the Renault Group from Seat-Cupra five years ago and will depart on 15 July. Renault said a hunt for a new group CEO "based on the already defined succession plan" has been launched.

"Luca de Meo's departure is unequivocally a blow to Renault," said Stephen Reitman, automotive analyst at banking firm Bernstein. "We are saddened by the loss."

Reitman's obituary-like response is a reaction to the enormous impact de Meo has had on Renault since joining in July 2020.

Then, the French firm seemed unsavable. The loss of sales from Covid shutdowns meant it was losing €15 million (£12.8m) a day. What's more, the Alliance with Nissan that brought much-needed scale was on the rocks, the line-up was unremarkable and morale was low. Immediately, de Meo brought to bear his experience from the Volkswagen Group and Fiat and transformed the place.

"When I came into the design room in 2020, there were 20 concepts. I think three-quarters were small cars for very exotic markets," he said in 2023. "I changed the whole product plan in six weeks."

Out went the majority of the small cars and in their place came bigger SUVs in more profitable compact and mid-size segments, including the Symbioz, Scenic, Austral, Espace and Rafale. Dacia gained the Bigster above the Duster.

Luca de Meo turned the Renault Group around in his five successful years

He restructured the Alliance, repairing relations and switching to a less formal partnership between the two companies. He found shared values at Geely and sought out information and tie-ups in China in the battle to reduce costs and speed up development.

De Meo attacked the problem of making money on pricey EVs in the same way he extracted Volkswagen Group brand Seat from the financial doldrums by creating the Cupra brand. He made cars that people would want to pay more for.

The replacement for the worthy but ordinary Renault Zoe EV became the Renault 5 reboot and there was the bonus of the Renault 4 small SUV atop the same platform also leveraging a past icon.

The reason for de Meo's departure has not been disclosed. He was certainly frustrated that Renault's shares hadn't performed better despite his turnaround. The company's value based on its share price is still lower than that of unprofitable newcomers like Xpeng and Rivian. Alternatively, Kering might have just offered him a more attractive deal.

What comes next is the big question. The Renault Group's share price lost 8% on the news of de Meo's exit and Kering's climbed 11%. All eyes will be on Renault Group chairman Jean-Dominique Senard to make a similarly inspired move as he did hiring de Meo.

Renault has hinted at an internal candidate, saying the board "had initiated the process of appointing a new CEO based on the already defined succession plan". That implies three potential candidates: head of Dacia Denis Le Vot, Renault brand boss Fabrice Cambolive and Renault Group chief technology officer and Alpine CEO Philippe Krief.
NICK GIBBS

De Meo ushered in small SUVs such as the Scenic, the 2024 Car of the Year

WHO WILL FIGHT AUTOMOTIVE'S CORNER NOW?

WILL RIMELL

This feels like the end of an era for the automotive industry: Luca de Meo's resignation comes just six months after Carlos Tavares left as CEO of Stellantis. These two were always the loudest voices in the mainstream media, campaigning about the importance of the automotive sector and why its struggles should be listened to.

Losing both high-profile figures at a time when the car industry is crying out for support feels notable.

Tavares, for example, knew how to push a key point to the media and bridge the gap between automotive and the general public.

De Meo was brilliant at this too. Recently, he even teamed up with Stellantis chairman John Elkann to demand legislative changes to reduce the price of small cars. It made headlines across Europe, largely because of de Meo's very quotable speech.

With him now gone, it's vital the new generation of automotive CEOs step in as cheerleaders of the industry.

HONDA'S TWINGO EV RIVAL TO STAR AT GOODWOOD

HONDA WILL SHOW a concept car that previews a new city-focused EV at next month's Goodwood Festival of Speed.

Called the Super EV Concept, it paves the way for an A-segment hatchback to rival the Hyundai Inster, Fiat 500e and upcoming Renault Twingo. Its styling draws on the short-lived Honda E supermini.

Technical details remain scarce, but Honda said the car is intended to show how a small, affordable EV can be fun to drive. It has already been tested in the UK as part of a broader international rollout.

The Super EV Concept will be unveiled in full on 10 July. Honda will also use the event to showcase the bold 0 Series SUV concept in Europe for the first time, as well as the Civic Type R Ultimate Edition. The new Prelude coupé will run up the Goodwood hillclimb.

Honda's electric city car has been testing in the UK; its debut is on 10 July

OFFICIAL PICTURE

KIA EV9 GETS 502BHP GT

The Kia EV9 is now a £82,185 Porsche Macan EV rival following the launch of a 502bhp GT range-topper. With that power, the 2.6-tonne SUV sprints to 62mph from rest in 4.6sec, which is as quick as a Volkswagen Golf R. It also has the same virtual gearshift tech as the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N. The dual-motor powertrain draws on the same 99.8kWh battery for a range of 280 miles. Deliveries start in September.

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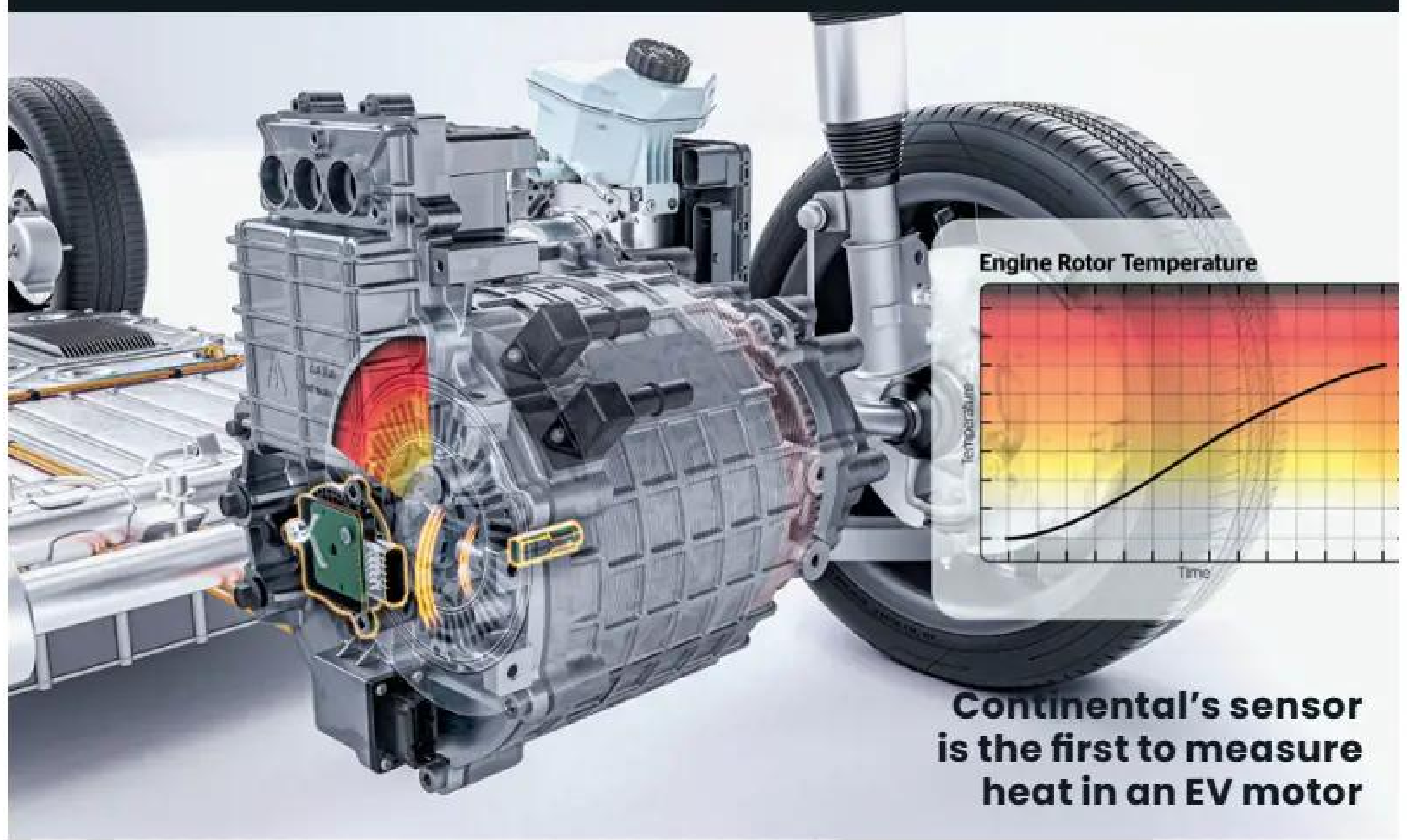
Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



Continental's sensor is the first to measure heat in an EV motor

A TEMPERATURE CHECK THAT REDUCES RARE-EARTH USAGE

WE'RE MOVING AWAY from heat engines with the transition from ICE cars to EVs, but heat still plays a big part in the performance and wellbeing of all electric cars. With that in mind, Continental has developed a device called an e-Motor Rotor Temperature Sensor (eRTS), which monitors temperature more accurately than software-based simulation and should reduce the amount of rare-earth material used in permanent magnet synchronous motors.

Batteries, motors and inverters all generate heat due to the power they are handling and the majority of them use liquid cooling.

Most EVs also use permanent magnet motors that have rare-earth magnets embedded in the rotors. Although some manufacturers have chosen to substitute permanent magnets for electromagnetic windings in the rotor, rare-earth permanent magnets have traditionally been the go-to solution to achieve high power and efficiency.

However, the environmental impact of extracting and processing them is significant. The current geopolitical turmoil is also raising concerns over supply and most of them come from China, so alternatives – like asynchronous magnet-free motors – or using less of them are advantageous.

Permanent magnets also have a vulnerability: overheating. If magnetised material reaches a certain temperature known as the Curie point, which varies depending on the material, it can become demagnetised. If that happens to the magnets in an EV motor, then the performance will at least diminish and at worst the motor will fail.

The heat of rotors today is not measured directly but calculated by algorithms developed through simulation and based on temperatures recorded by a sensor on the stator (the windings surrounding the rotor that don't move).

Because the temperature is calculated rather than directly measured, manufacturers leave a fairly large margin of error on the figure calculated by the algorithms of 15deg C. The temperature of an EV rotor can rise to around 150deg C, so to protect magnets from demagnetisation, enough rare-earth elements must be used to cover the entire tolerance range and ensure the magnets don't overheat.

Using a temperature sensor is much more precise. It reduces that margin to only 3deg C and enables the use of less rare-earth material.

The eRTS is a clever device in other ways, too, and can generate its own power. It's in two parts. One is a mote sensor (mote means small particle) embedded in the rotor, which senses the temperature of the magnets. The second is a transducer (which converts one kind of energy into another) sitting outside the motor casing. Through piezo ultrasound, the mote can generate the tiny amount of power it needs wirelessly, as well as transmitting the temperature data. Sometimes the smallest things can have great significance.

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EVTT AUD

AUDI POISED TO REVEAL ALL-NEW LOOK THIS YEAR

Concept car will show the fresh approach taken by its new design boss

Audi will preview its all-new look under design boss Massimo Frascella when it reveals a new concept car later this year.

Frascella joined Audi from JLR 18 months ago and his impact on the German brand will be seen for the first time before 2025 is out, CEO Gernot Döllner has confirmed.

Döllner did not reveal the size or type of car that the concept will preview but said Audi will only produce concept cars that have true production intent and it will be "a bold step" for the brand and its design.

"We won't show studies any more," said Döllner. "When we show things, [they] will be substantial. Every concept we show will have a product decision behind it."

The new design for Audi will "look to the future and the strengths of Audi design, for clarity and to bring that to the future, not copying the past". To that end, Frascella is known to be a big fan of the original TT and Audi's Bauhaus styling of that era.

The new look is likely to take some time to make its way to the road – potentially 2028 at the earliest, working on a typical three-year production cycle.

In the meantime, Döllner said upcoming Audis (the brand is in the middle of rolling out 20 new cars over two years) are cars he is "positive about and excellent products" but "we need a bigger step as a brand".

Döllner praised the impact that Frascella is having on Audi and said the pair of them have "a clear vision for Audi design".

He added: "I'm really happy and impressed with what he already brought on in a year at Audi."

Döllner also confirmed that Audi will lead development of all Volkswagen Group hardware and software architectures for larger models – essentially anything from an A4/A5-sized vehicle and up. This includes the next-generation SSP platform, which will enable the group to move to software-defined vehicles for the first time. That project involves Rivian, which the VW Group has invested heavily in, and the first Audis on the SSP platform will hit the market in late 2027/2028.

Audi head of design Massimo Frascella is a fan of the original TT

However, Audi is trimming its model range and has no plans to replace the A1 and Q2 models because those segments belong to the likes of VW, Cupra and Skoda within the VW Group.

As a result, the Q3 and A3 will represent the entry point of the line-up. The range-toppers will be the A8 on the "low car" side and the Q7 and Q8 SUVs, with a mooted Q9 joining the line-up.

An all-electric A3-sized car is in development for 2026 as an additional model in the range, confirmed Döllner, but

Modern take on Audi's Bauhaus era could be applied to a TT successor

Q&A GERNOT DOLLNER, CEO, AUDI

Audi has changed its naming strategy again. How does it land now?

"A is for flat cars, Q is for SUVs and the number stands for the size of the car, full stop. No link to equal or odd numbers for drivetrains and so on. Drivetrains will be characterised by E-tron for battery-electric vehicles and E-hybrids. That's it."

How are you reacting to tariffs from America?

"We have factories with 27.5% tariffs in Mexico and North America. That definitely affects our business. We are working with European and German governments, and while negotiations are ongoing, we are not changing our price position. We are looking at bringing production into VW Group factories already in the US and elaborating to see if there is an opportunity to build a factory, but that's highly dependent on the tariff situation.

"We see huge opportunities in the US and see the necessity. Our competitors are much stronger here. If you want to be successful in the US, you need local production and that's our main driver. It's a strategic decision for 15-20 years."

Innovation and rapid improvements to electric cars seem to be harming their residual values. When will this change?

"The innovation gradient is very steep as this is a very young technology. As this flattens in terms of range, battery and efficiency, that will help stabilise residual values. But it's still a question of total cost of ownership, and [in some markets] the energy price is the main driver. We should be working to reduce the price of electrical energy."

> **"Every concept we show will have a production decision behind it"**

there are no plans for Audi to create its own version of the Volkswagen ID 2/Skoda Epiq/Cupra Raval entry-level electric car.

The brand's new Formula 1 team will also "inspire us to think about road cars of the future", according to Döllner, in reference to any specific models that might link the road and race efforts. But there will also be learnings from efficiency and hybrid powertrain management from the new F1 engine rules for the 2026 season that could filter down to Audi's road cars too.

Asked if the F1 team means Audi is considering a return for the likes of the R8 and TT, Döllner said the firm is "thinking about everything… We are car guys. Let yourself be surprised."

He added: "There is room for Audi in such fields. We are evaluating different options but it's a little too early to talk about that."

MARK TISSHAW

AUDI AXES PLAN TO END ICE CARS IN 2033, INCLUDING FOR RS MODELS

Audi has reversed its decision to end the development and sale of combustion-engined cars in 2033 and now has no fixed date for such a plan.

The German firm had already pushed back that date after it had previously planned to end development next year.

Speaking to Autocar, CEO Gernot Döllner emphasised that he "had not been the one to communicate the end date". The decision was taken by previous management. But he confirmed that he has reversed it because he "believes in flexibility", a stance that also applies to Audi's high-performance RS models.

Döllner said: "Audi is launching from 2024-2026 a completely new line-up of internal combustion engine and plug-in hybrid vehicles, and that gives us complete flexibility for at least another seven, eight, maybe 10 years, and then we will see how our markets develop.

"We have already decided to extend the production beyond the communicated end dates of the past."

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Döllner wants Audi to be "the progressive choice" among premium brands

AT A TIME of unprecedented change within and pressure on the automotive industry, having three CEOs in a little over five years will do strange things to a firm.

Gernot Döllner has been in Audi's top job for almost two years and has spent a fair chunk of that time unpicking some reactionary and occasionally bizarre decisions of predecessors.

His reversal of the previous decision to end the development and sale of combustion engines was an obvious move. There was also a victory for common sense when he cancelled a plan to rename Audis with odd and even numbers based on their powertrains.

The "only mistake was that we maybe changed it a couple of months too late", Döllner told me in reference to the new A4 being named A5 too close to production for it to be reversed. Expect that to be corrected by the mid-life facelift.

He is also keen to put Audi's software woes behind it and refers to the Vorsprung durch Technik phrase as a guiding light for its development here too.

Software issues delayed the Q6 E-tron and Döllner admitted it "got stuck in the pipeline". That bottleneck is why so many new Audis are now being launched in a short time – 20 in two years. Two models per year is his goal when it settles down.

Audi's range has grown exponentially this century, sometimes at the expense of the sharpness of the brand itself. Döllner doesn't want to stand still in volume terms but would rather growth came "in quality and revenue per car rather than absolute sales".

The company is no longer striving to be the biggest premium brand and Döllner is happy for Audi to be "the challenger" against the likes of BMW and Mercedes and "the progressive choice".

He is also overhauling Audi's development team to ensure faster product development, alongside 7500 job cuts over the next two years to make Audi a leaner operation.

Given this focus on brand, eyebrows were raised when Audi recently introduced a new brand for China wearing an AUDI logo rather than the four rings and based on the platform of a Chinese EV from SAIC.

Döllner said Audi acknowledges the risk but he is "quite sure this sister brand will stay in China" and the approach is right as it is a "Chinese product in a Chinese ecosystem… that appears for quite specific Chinese customers".

Such growth overall has made it hard to work out what the core of Audi is. When asked what he thought the 'core' Audi model is (it's the Golf for Volkswagen and the 911 for Porsche, for example), he listed several cars. Audi still awaits its staple model, yet Vorsprung durch Technik remains the thing that links the Audi eras.

So there's still much to work through as Audi finds its way again, but Döllner is "sure you will soon see a very different company".

> **"Döllner has spent a chunk of time unpicking the odd decisions of predecessors"**

At any time
WEST GREEN ROA
STOP

FAMILIES RALLY AGAINST CUTS TO LOLLIPOP CROSSINGS

Safety concerns raised as councils cut back on school crossing patrols

Families across the UK are campaigning to stem the decline in school crossing patrol officers, otherwise known as lollipop men and women, in the face of council cutbacks.

They argue the roles are still needed, given that new police data released in June reported that 413 pedestrians were killed in 2024, an increase of 2% compared with 2023, amounting to a quarter of all road-related deaths. People aged 16 years and under accounted for 4% of these deaths and 10% of those injured.

The figures have been released against a background of reductions in school crossing patrols, the numbers of which have halved in the past 10 years but which their supporters insist make roads safer for children.

Croydon Council is one of the latest to scrap its lollipop patrollers, with schools losing them at the end of the current term.

"This decision leaves me worried for the future safety of our children," said a parent of children attending one of the six affected schools. "The presence of lollipop men and women is essential."

A Croydon Council spokesperson said "most patrols were phased out many years ago" and risk assessments for the remaining sites will result in a new permanent crossing at one and temporary crossings at three more.

Elsewhere, alarmed by the withdrawal of their schools' crossing officers, concerned parents around the country have taken to campaign platforms to rally support for their reinstatement. Among them is one to save the crossing officer at Dalbeattie High School near Dumfries in Scotland, which also has a nursery and a primary school nearby.

Diana Finnigan, whose 10-year-old grandson attends the primary school, is opposing the council's decision to withdraw crossing staff and has started an online petition that has so far attracted 500 signatures.

"I live close to the school and see every day how dangerous the roads outside it are for children," she said. "Local councillors say the children can use the light-controlled crossings but you can't assume every child, especially young ones, will. Some just ignore the lights and dash across, risking their lives. I've seen cars jump the lights too."

A spokesman for Dumfries and Galloway Council confirmed its intention to withdraw crossing patrol officers from the school. "Elected members of the council chose to remove crossing patrol staff from automated crossings," he said. "Council officers are preparing communications so that parents and carers are aware of the changes."

This month, road safety charity Brake highlighted that 16 primary school-age children are harmed on UK roads every day and called for a blanket 20mph speed limit outside schools.

However, while accepting that crossing patrols can play a vital role in keeping children safe, Brake campaigns manager Luca Straker said what mattered more was ensuring safety measures are in place.

"One of the key elements of road safety for schools is having safe places to cross," said Straker. "That could be crossing patrols, it could be fixed crossings, but what we need to ensure is that there is something in place that enables children to cross the road safely."

JOHN EVANS

WHEN DID LOLLIPOP PATROLS START?

Crossing patrols for children were in use in the early 1930s, although some reports credit Mary Hunt, a school caretaker who began to informally help children cross the road in Bath in 1937, as the first 'lollipop lady'.

It took another 26 years for school crossing patrols to be officially enshrined in law as part of new road safety measures brought in by the government.

A classic tool of a lollipop man or woman, the distinctive 'lollipop' sign was introduced in the 1960s and the yellow coat arrived a decade later.

STOP!
CHILDREN
CROSSING

Oxford, 1933: an early lollipop man helps children cross the road

GETTY IMAGES

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Luca de Meo has been a charismatic and shrewd leader in the car world

MONDAY

I'm so disappointed in Luca de Meo. His decision to quit the top job at the Renault Group has left me feeling bereft, not least because over the years – at Toyota, Fiat-Alfa-Abarth, VW, Seat and finally Renault and Alpine – I've got to know him quite well and seen him as the ultimate car guy. For me, he has been Europe's last really great car leader. De Meo has often been lauded for combining passion with a gimlet eye for balance sheets but, having seen him in so many roles, I'm convinced his truest strength is confident, charismatic leadership, the same kind wielded by Stellantis's Carlos Tavares until the job overcame him.

I'm sure de Meo is conscious of Tavares's experience: no matter how good you are, the job will eventually find you out. It's probably wise to leave some problems for your successors, and Renault still has a few. But de Meo's previous jobs have lasted five to seven years and he's already done five-plus at Renault, so it probably is time for a sayonara. But saving Gucci doesn't seem a big enough job for a bloke like Luca, and I'm very sorry to see him go.

This Spitfire so nearly joined Cropley's stable in a moment of auction fever

> "Saving Gucci doesn't seem a big enough job for Luca"

WEDNESDAY

I wonder, often, how many cars sold online go to people who were simply seized by the moment. I'm addicted to online auctions and came within a pulse-beat of buying a nicely restored Triumph Spitfire (not a car I need) because its owner wrote charmingly that he knew he'd never get his resto money back but thought the car deserved saving. It was nearly irresistible.

THURSDAY

I drove out of central London around 6.30am as I do a couple of times a week, surrounded by the usual aggressive drivers of black airport cars that dice with one another at double the speed limit to be first to Heathrow. It can be nerve-racking, because if you stay somewhere near the ruling 20mph speed limit (I've been nicked for 24mph), these serially impatient people view you as a mobile chicane and give you a hard time.

Today was different. I rolled along with what I'm convinced is the friendliest car on the road, a late-1960s Land Rover Series 2 – the model with its humanoid round headlights set close to its simple, wire grille, before they moved the lights to the wings. This was a satisfactorily battered, entirely healthy, steel-blue short-wheelbase model, driven by a contented bloke who was happy to obey the law, knowing he was plenty early enough to beat the congestion charge. I'm sure old Landie owners don't think about the message they send the rest of us by driving about but, for me, their achievement (as well as sustaining a deserving old car) is to make us feel a bit happier.

FRIDAY

I really enjoyed Le Mans this year, partly because it was a close race to the finish won by a deserving underdog, but mostly because I'd paid £17 to the FIA so I could watch the live action on my phone at any time of the day or night. My friend Matt Prior has often talked about watching far-flung motor races online (I think his preference is Aussie V8 supercars) but this was a first for me and I was really surprised how the special aura of the fabulous French race transferred to my iPhone. This FIA app idea may not play well with your partner when you wake at 3am to check whether Ferrari is still running one-two-three, but it's a risk worth taking. I think this app also gives access to other WEC races throughout the year, so I'll watch them too.

AND ANOTHER THING

3761 mi
94.4 mi
278 mi

It's a great time for EV owners: on very warm days like these, batteries tend to do their best work. Autocar's new Renault 5 (our 'hello' report will be in the next issue) has an official range of 250 miles and an honest, real-world potential of 220. But – spoiler alert – lately it has promised anything up to 278 miles, and delivers most of that too.

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

There was a time when bosses at car manufacturers didn't like to talk about platforms – the mechanical underpinnings of their cars. These are expensive to develop, so big car companies share them across brands, and bosses used to think that it might be perceived as bad news if the public knew that a cheap car was largely the same underneath as an expensive one. So they preferred to keep schtum.

The really difficult and pricey bit to develop was – and still is, most notably in cars with engines – the area between the front wheels and the driver, because largely everything substantial goes into it. There's the engine itself, of course, plus the transmission, while behind it is the dashboard and everything that entails, including a whole heap of the electronics – more electronics than ever. Behind it is, put in very crude terms, something a car is just dragging around. So the same platform can host many different lengths of car.

That whole area is where the hard work goes. It has to be compact enough that a driver can see over the top of it. The structure around it has to be rigid enough to properly support the suspension and strong enough to support the forces flowing from the doors in a side impact. And yet it needs to be flexible enough to absorb frontal impacts without forcing the whole shebang into the passenger compartment.

More recently, it's where loads of active safety and convenience equipment – sensors, cameras and more – have had to be mounted too.

Throwing in the fact that engines and gearboxes are now far more complex than ever means this part of a combustion-engined car is by some distance the most critical and expensive bit, so if a car maker can engineer it once and use it multiple times, so much the better.

AUTOCAR IMAGE
VW27 IDR
In-wheel motors will let the ID 2 R differ in layout from its platform-mates

Whatever decisions a manufacturer makes in this area therefore defines a raft of models. But thinking that customers wouldn't necessarily appreciate knowing that, they didn't always want to talk about it.

It turns out, though, that the car buying public doesn't care that much at all if what lives beneath, say, their Audi is similar to what lives beneath their Skoda. I've heard people say "it's basically a Volkswagen underneath" about a Skoda to convince themselves they've got a well-engineered budget car. But I don't think I've heard someone say the same about their Porsche Cayenne. They seem contented that Porsche has done extra work somewhere and that it was worth paying for.

And since it turns out that few people seem to care either way, in my experience car makers today seem less guarded about talking platforms and architectures than they used to be.

"It's now much easier to talk to engineers about their cars"

That has made it much easier to talk to designers and engineers about their cars. It has helped them to explain new models and helped us understand them. It has also (and it's possible that they like this less) made it easier to quiz them about upcoming variants, particularly when it comes to sporty versions. If we know a particular engine fits or can make a certain amount of power, or if we know a platform has been made to accommodate four-wheel drive, then surely, engineer, you could, you know, make a GTI/R/RS/etc, couldn't you? Do tell us more.

Sometimes that has prompted a clear answer: "Sorry, mate, that platform can't be four-wheel drive, and it would be too expensive to engineer it differently for just a few sporty cars, so there will be no really fast variant of that car."

In the case of EVs, things aren't quite so straightforward. Four-wheel-drive EVs need only a motor at the back, not a driveshaft from the front. But if the rear suspension, a subframe or the body isn't designed to accommodate one, it's still an expensive re-engineering job.

Or rather it was. It turns out that this particular platform limitation might no longer apply. It's suggested (News, 11 June) that the upcoming Volkswagen ID 2 R will have not only a powerful front motor but also a motor inside each rear wheel. No room for a motor and a differential under the boot floor? No problem: in the hub it can go. I hadn't thought about that before, but I think it basically means almost any platform could end up hosting any drive configuration that a manufacturer chooses.

The rules as we know them continue to shift.

GET IN TOUCH
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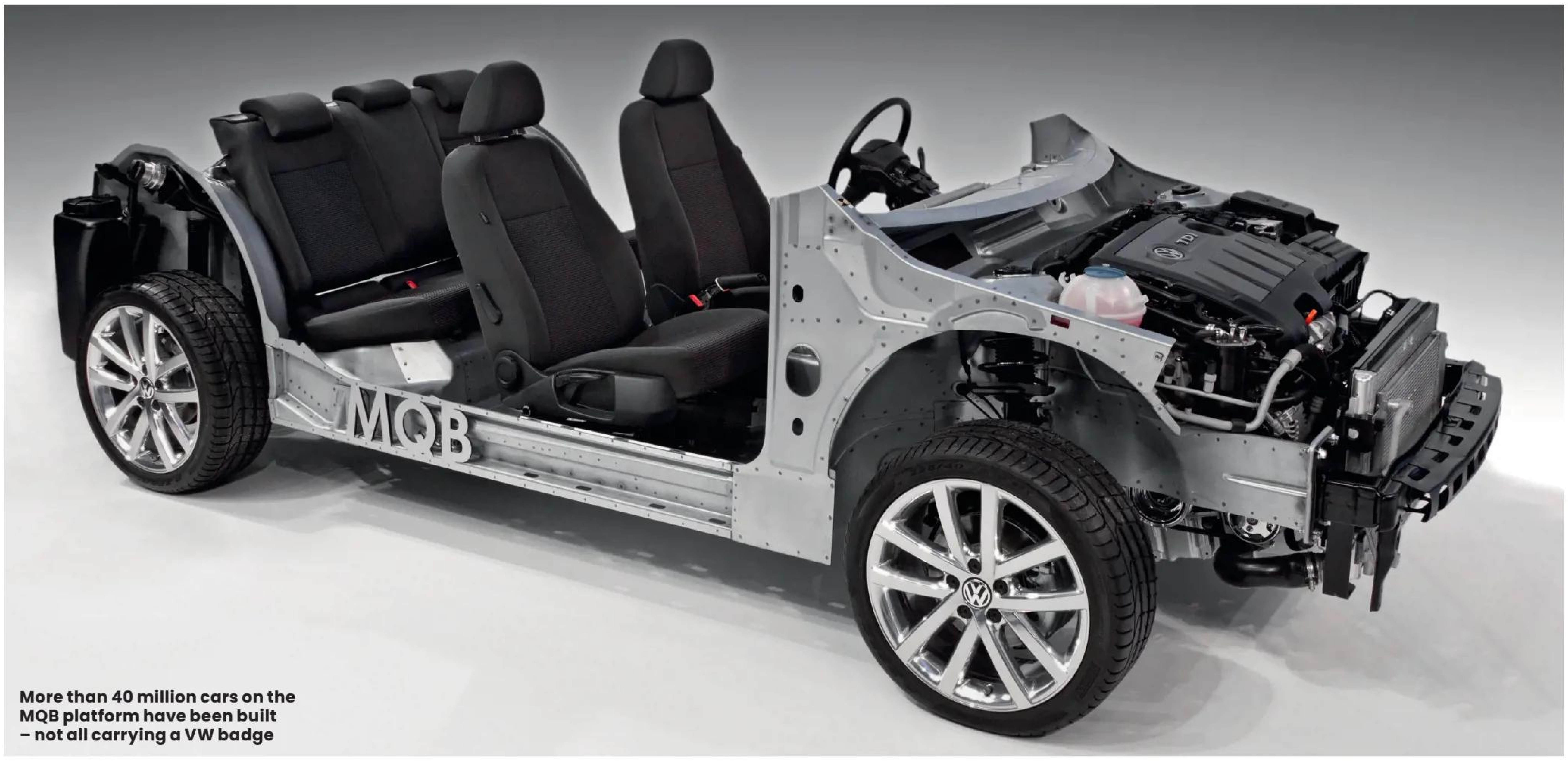

More than 40 million cars on the MQB platform have been built – not all carrying a VW badge

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Kubica parades AF Corse team-mates Hanson (left) and Ye after Le Mans win

Talk about taking a view of the bigger picture. A chance to ride in the Goodyear Blimp offered me a spectacular fresh perspective on the recent Le Mans 24 Hours, just as the great race was setting in for its Saturday evening grind.

The American tyre company's airship has been a near-ubiquitous sight in the skies above race tracks since 1973, and in the 100th-anniversary year of the best advertising billboard ever conceived, the Blimp was back for the 93rd edition of Le Mans. I thought I knew the place pretty well, but the gentle ride revealed the 8.4-mile Circuit de la Sarthe's unexpected secrets (such as a pond that someone has created in the shape of Silverstone!) and brought home just how vast this race is in scale. Oh, and even up there above the helicopters and private jets taking off from the nearby runway, the V12 squall of Aston Martin's Valkyrie was claiming the sonic victory just as it was on the ground.

FERRARI'S HAT-TRICK

As the new Astons at least went the distance on their debuts to finish a respectable 12th and 14th, Le Mans this year remained the domain of Ferrari. The Hypercar hat-trick was never much in doubt as the three 499Ps remained lodged at the top of the timing screens for most of the duration. But which would win? After a race stuck in a strange kind of stasis, the answer only really emerged in the final hours: it would be the yellow one, the so-called customer car that in reality is a satellite entry run by the same AF Corse team responsible for the red 'works' cars.

That means each of the 499Ps and their crews have now conquered the jewel of the World Endurance Championship. Ferrari could never have imagined such an unbeaten run, especially in the alarmingly stark contrast of its lacklustre form in Formula 1. How long before endurance racing boss Antonello Coletta succeeds Frédéric Vasseur at the grand prix team, we wonder?

> **"There's no dwelling on his injuries. He just presses on"**

Robert Kubica was immense as the #83 car's driving force. The 40-year-old's comeback from the horrific rally crash in 2011 that almost cost him his right arm is already long established as among racing's most astonishing. But to watch him take this race in a vice-like grip stirred fresh emotion. Once rated as the equal of Lewis Hamilton, Kubica was lined up for a Ferrari F1 drive for 2012 before fate had crueller ideas. To now win Le Mans for Maranello, with a heroic quintuple final stint of more than 50 laps to see the job through, was a privilege to witness.

A LANDMARK RESULT

Kubica reminds me of Niki Lauda. There's no overwrought emotion, no dwelling on his injuries. He just presses on.

"[During] my time here at Le Mans, I've always been close [to victory]," Poland's first Le Mans winner reflected. "Okay, the first three years I raced in LMP2 [the secondary class], but out of the last five Le Mans, my cars have been racing in the top three positions 70-80% of the time. Now I've finally managed to win it, and in Hypercar, so that means overall. The Rolex will be nice!"

Things look different from the Goodyear Blimp, but the V12s sound the same

At his first Le Mans in 2021, Kubica watched a debut class win slip away on the final lap when his WRT-run Oreca failed in the hands of young Chinese team-mate Yifei Ye. How fitting they should still be together to throw off what their other team-mate Phil Hanson described as a Le Mans "jinx". Ye is China's first Le Mans winner, but this was also a home victory of sorts: he first came to the town to study at the tender age of 14.

Meanwhile, Hanson becomes only the third Brit to score an overall Le Mans win for Ferrari, after fellow 499P driver James Calado and Lord Selsdon of Croydon, who drove only briefly in Ferrari's first Le Mans win way back in 1949. This was the final vindication for Hanson's decision as a teenager to avoid single-seaters and focus instead on building a sports car career. Now at just 25 and already an LMP2 class winner with eight previous Le Mans appearances behind him, he has landed the biggest victory of his life.

WHO'S NEXT?

Ahead of the race, McLaren and Ford shared more about their Hypercar plans as car makers continue to flock back to Le Mans. McLaren revealed a twin-turbo V6 LMDh car built in partnership with Dallara for a debut in 2027, the same year Ford will return in alliance with Oreca.

Such are the numbers that even if (when) a manufacturer tires of not winning and pulls the plug on its Hypercar campaign, there will be enough still left to keep this fantastic era as buoyant as Goodyear's Blimp.

The best of times? That's a big subjective call. But the here and now sure is compelling.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

THE KEY TO BRAND LOYALTY

Will Rimell's report on picking up his long-term Dacia Duster (28 May) and the feelgood experience of the bells-and-whistles handover from Renault London West struck a chord with me, as I have recently bought a pre-owned RX 450h from Lexus Cheltenham and enjoyed a similar experience.

The car was not new (although the as-new condition of it after the dealership's pre-sale prep could have led you to believe otherwise), but my wife and I got the full treatment, with covers on the car, a bouquet for my wife and a big 'Thank you for buying from us' card.

I believe that such things are important these days, especially now with car sales to private buyers like me on the decrease in the UK. The price of the car was about half that of the upper range of their new cars, but we still left the dealership with the feeling that we were the most important customers they had. I've bought many high-end cars over the years, including from Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Porsche, but if in a few years' time I look back at the day I picked up each of my vehicles, there will only be one that sticks in my mind.

Other dealerships should take note and understand the brand loyalty encouraged by Will's excitement and mine during handover. It's not rocket science, but it is important.

Stuart Crewe, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire

ADAS EMBARRASSMENT

I agree wholeheartedly with Illya Verpraet about adaptive cruise control (Testing, Testing, 4 June): it simply doesn't work as it should and is inferior to normal cruise control.

I find ACC as utterly exasperating as Illya clearly does. I once suggested on a forum dedicated to my type of car that ACC was less than satisfactory. I seemed to be alone in thinking this. Those who replied said I couldn't be using it properly, which was a bit tiresome.

I recently found a new gripe about ADAS. On a very narrow single-track road in Cornwall, I met another car and reversed a little way back into a passing space. This being Cornwall, the hedgerow and verge were high, which activated my reversing sensors, so the car automatically slammed on the brakes in a really shocking manner. It was clear from the reversing camera that there was only grass in the way, yet the system wouldn't allow me to reverse any farther. I had to pull back out into the lane and reverse again so that I left less space for the oncoming vehicle.

It took an embarrassing amount of time for such a simple manoeuvre, too. The look on that driver's face as he thanked me told me what he thought of my driving. Pathetically, I longed for the chance to explain…

Mark Lanyon
Via email

BOGGO DELIGHT

I've just returned from a great holiday in Malta, where I won the hire car lottery. I had ticked the 'Peugeot 308 estate or similar' box and was given a Ford Focus 1.5 diesel estate, rather elderly (circa 2018) and in a lowly spec.

I absolutely loved it! It had manual air conditioning, a manual gearbox, a proper handbrake and a lovely torquey diesel engine. It used hardly any fuel (helped by Malta's price of £1 per litre for diesel) and was a delight to drive. The steering, ride and handling on Malta's chaotic roads was sublime and it swallowed four adults and their holiday luggage with ease. Best of all, not even a vestige of a touchscreen.

It made me rather sad, though, both for the state of 2025's crop of new cars and the state of the once renowned Blue Oval. Cars like this have been ruined by a combination of cack-handed legislation and cack-handed management at Ford. I simply couldn't buy a new car so well suited to my tastes.

I'm hoping to retire soon and have been agonising over how to replace my BMW 530e Touring company car. I might just spend £10,000 on a 2018 Focus 1.5 diesel estate – in the lowest spec I can find.

Nick Smith
Via email

What more could you want than a basic old Focus diesel estate?

Mini Aceman JCW: ain't she a beaut?

Lots of families need a car like this, says Iain

REx OR PHEV?

From memory, the Chevrolet Volt/Vauxhall Ampera was more sophisticated than a plain range-extender EV ('Range against the machine', 11 June). I think that when high power was asked for, the petrol engine and electric motor outputs could both be fed to the wheels – ie the car got the total power of both.

This raises the philosophical question of what constitutes good engineering: doing the job required at low cost (like Ford) or being more sophisticated and complex at the risk of being uncompetitive? Although presumably both the engine and motor could be smaller and slightly cheaper and lighter using the Volt/Ampera design.

Stuart Annable
Soberton, Hampshire

General Motors initially claimed that the engine never drove the wheels but later acknowledged that it did contribute in rare instances of heavy acceleration at high speeds (over about 70mph) – KC

DON'T FEED THE TROLLS

All the comments and trolling about the new Nissan Micra (Your Views, 4 June) were a bit harsh. It's pleasant enough to look at, and it's a bit rich to judge it compared with Autocar's Mini Aceman E long-termer and Mini Aceman JCW road test car. Jeez, the JCW in particular has been hit with the ugly stick, and yet not a word about its styling.

Tom May
Via email

OTT ACRONYMS

I read with avid interest your news article on the new Audi RS6 (4 June). Being of a certain maturing age, let's say, I've just got to grips with the likes of EV and PHEV, but we now have PPE and PPC. Blimey – and when the term ICE re-entered the mix, I wondered why all the fuss over in-car entertainment systems. Just throw me the keys and I'm off.

Paul Harrison
Via email

SLIDING DOORS MOMENT

I was interested to read that a new Volkswagen Touran is in the works (News, 4 June). What we really need, though, is a new Sharan (and Seat Alhambra) that's a proper MPV, not an SUV like the Renault Espace now is. So many families with multiple car seats have tried the likes of the Volkswagen Tiguan Allspace and Seat Tarraco and had to hunt out the increasingly rare 'real' MPVs. A new Touran is a start, but it needs to be bigger and have sliding doors.

Iain Cowper
Via Facebook

LOOKS CAN KILL

Volkswagen really should remember to send its engineering ideas to the design house. It remembers occasionally but so often it forgets that to sell a product, particularly in a competitive marketplace, it really should style the thing. It doesn't matter how good a product is if nobody notices it. The ID 3 and ID 5 designs took inspiration from one of the engineer's lunchboxes – and funnily enough, electric aside, nobody wants one.

Michael Gregson
Via Facebook

A CALL FOR RESTRAINT

I love safety innovations, although I'm not sure I trust my safety to a 'smart' seatbelt device yet (News, 4 June).

I know Volvo will have implemented fail-safes, but reading that a seatbelt can receive over-the-air software updates just makes me think of all the bugs and problems plaguing modern cars with such reliance on software.

Thinking more about the capitalist hellscape, how long until you have to pay extra for the smart features of this new seatbelt versus the current 'normal' method?

Hyfrith
Via autocar.co.uk

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

ValetPRO
DRAGON'S BREATH
CERAMIC SHAMPOO
GLASS CLEANER

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 2 JULY

FEATURE

LJ72 AEC
CATERHAM

WE DRIVE CATERHAM'S FUTURE

The British sports car maker has adopted all-new engines from Renault-Geely specialist Horse for its racers. Matt Prior has a go

MOTORSPORT

ASTON MARTIN

ASTON MARTIN AT LE MANS

A behind-the-scenes look at the British firm's return to this iconic race

ROAD TEST

VOLVO XC90

Can a facelift keep a decade-old car feeling fresh? Our testers find out

EVERY WEEK

USED GUIDE

FERRARI 458

You can now buy the mid-engined supercar of your dreams for less than £100k. We tell you how

LIVING WITH A...

RENAULT 5

This year's most-talked-about car joins our long-term test fleet. Will the love-in continue?

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The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 18.6.25, WARWICKSHIRE **ON SALE** NOW

KIA EV6 GT

Kia borrows a few tricks from Hyundai's game-changing Ioniq 5 N to update its own hot EV

Three years ago, Kia surprised us with the original version of its hot EV6. These were the dark days before our world got lit up by the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N. Here came Kia with a car that didn't just have a power figure to raise eyebrows but was supposedly capable of pushing plenty of traditional driver's car buttons too. I liked it when we did our first 'fun EVs' test, even if a full road test later showed it not to be the fully rounded dynamic item.

Now, with the facelifted EV6, arrives an updated EV6 GT as well. At first glance, it looks like Kia has simply copied Hyundai's homework. It adopts the same dual motors (223bhp at the front axle, 378bhp at the back, a bit more at either end for short bursts) and bigger (84kWh) battery as the Ioniq 5 N, as well as its virtual gearbox. In reality, of course, the two teams are very closely connected, and this evolution was always planned.

The question remains what this Kia adds to the party. The pitch here from Kia is that, as the name suggests, the EV6 GT is more of a grand tourer: same performance, similar driver involvement, more comfort. That's slightly odd, since the regular EV6 is positioned as a sportier alternative to the loungey Ioniq 5, but fine, we'll go with it. The right tuning can make an enormous difference to how a car feels – and there's no shortage of things to tune in this sort of car: dampers, steering, limited-slip differential, synthesised noises…

The two cars may share a lot of mechanicals, but they look very different. The EV6 GT gets the same visual updates as the regular EV6 but with new 21in wheels and more aggressive bumpers. There's something sinewy about its front end, like a snarling dog – a bit aggressive for my liking, but it certainly has impact.

It's had a spruce-up inside too. Like in the regular EV6, a lot of the gloss black plastic surfaces are now matt with a brushed steel effect, and the dash is coated with a fabric similar to the woven stuff that BMW is so fond of lately. ▸

TESTER'S NOTE

The EV6 GT retains a drift mode too. It's engaged through a secret (not so secret: it's on YouTube) handshake of pressing buttons and holding paddles. It makes it feel as if the rear Michelins have been swapped for Linglongs. **IV**

> **"There's enough texture and complexity to its noise and behaviour that you can easily get sucked into the illusion"**

Is it an expensive-feeling cabin? Not really, but it is consistent, is original, feels high-quality and gives you quite a cocooned feeling – unlike in the loungey Ioniq 5 N.

The bucket seats (electrically adjustable here) are comfortable and supportive but do feel set slightly too high in relation to the otherwise quite enveloping interior.

Everything infotainment is top-notch: fast, intuitive and connected in all the ways you need. The multi-functional touch bar that switches between shortcuts and climate controls isn't my favourite, but it's better than these things being buried in the touchscreen, and there are separate physical controls for the heated and cooled seats.

Fast? Very. I actually put it through our Horiba MIRA road test procedure, because exploring the full performance envelope of such a car would be irresponsible on the road. With the same motors as the Ioniq 5 N, it unsurprisingly posts near-identical acceleration times.

That said, this is one of those cars where you have to be in the right constellation of settings for it to do the numbers. Plant your foot in Normal mode and it feels quick but not spectacularly so, as it only gives you the final 20% when you have kept your foot in it for a while. GT mode supposedly liberates full power but still yields only a 4.5sec 0-62mph time. To get the advertised 3.5sec, you need to engage launch control in a settings menu, which refuses duty if you haven't chosen the right drive mode and ESC mode.

Easier to access is the new 'virtual gear shift', as you can program the star button on the steering wheel to turn it on and off. It's a bit different to the system in the Ioniq 5 N, because there are only six 'gears' and the 'engine' sound is a more abstract spaceship noise, rather than a pastiche of a petrol engine.

There's enough texture and complexity to both the noise and the car's behaviour that you can easily get sucked into the illusion; it will clatter into the limiter and bog down if you try to accelerate from 30mph in sixth. It's too quiet, though: even in the loudest mode, you need to strain to hear it.

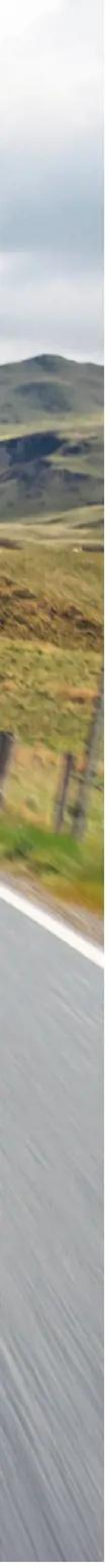
The brakes are strong too, and they proved fade-free through six consecutive stops. It's a by-wire system, with generally consistent pedal feel. It's a little light and over-sensitive at the top of the travel but generally very reassuring.

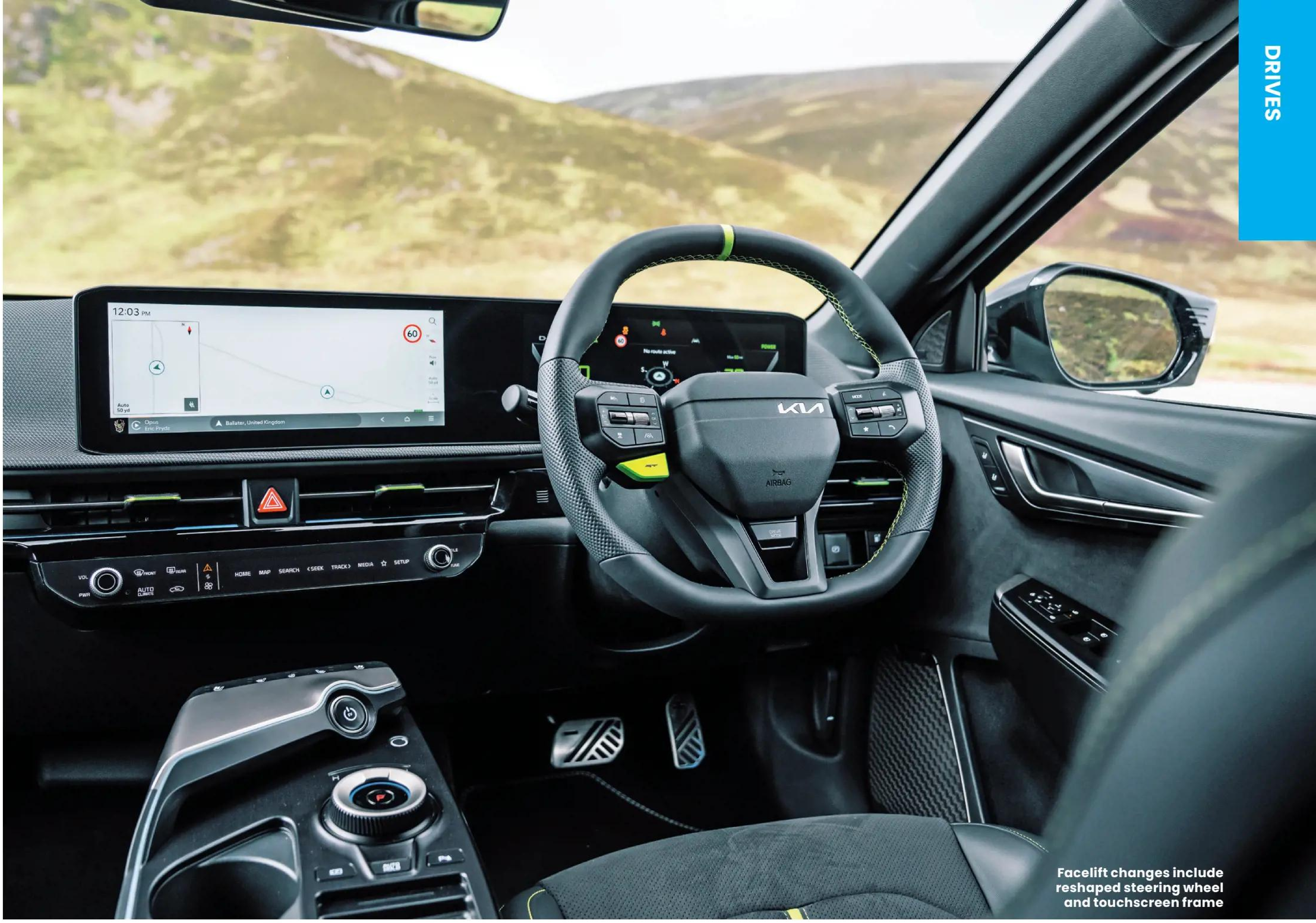
Anyway, the point of this updated EV6 GT is that it's more comfortable. And it is. The original EV6 GT had quite a supple ride on its adaptive suspension, and this one does too, despite the 21in wheels. There's a slight but persistent patter but, given the performance potential, there's not much to complain about here.

Thanks to more sound insulation than before and acoustic foam in the tyres, it's quiet too: I measured it at 66dBA at 70mph, which is less than both the Ioniq 5 N and the old EV6 GT and pretty good by any standard.

Which leaves the question of how much handling talent it sacrifices. Given the firmest suspension mode is unusable on the road in most cars, the decision to make the EV6 GT's a bit softer across the board is one with no real downside. Comfort mode covers most bases and Sport is usable if you want your body control just that little bit tighter. It still hides

EV6 GT feels smaller and lighter on the road than it really is





Facelift changes include reshaped steering wheel and touchscreen frame

its mass well on the road, and I find a bit of body roll quite useful in judging what a car is doing.

When you attack a corner, the balance feels different, though. Presumably this is partly a result of the suspension tuning and partly of the tyres: the Kia rides on 255-section Michelin Pilot Sport 4S rubber, whereas the Ioniq 5 N uses 275-section Pirelli P Zeros.

The Kia has a lazier front end. When you get it settled and you have the (fairly restrictive) ESC set to its Sport setting, the rear axle will still neatly push you through a corner, but it doesn't feel as alive; it's more susceptible to some understeer.

But make no mistake: this is still a world away from the much more inert stuff like a Skoda Enyaq vRS or Volvo EC40. On a track it can still cut loose, and while it lacks the Ioniq 5 N's slider for adjusting the front-to-rear power split, enough goes to the rear in GT mode to give you options, whether you're trying to be neat and tidy or want to coax it sideways.

The updated EV6 GT supposedly has a unique tune for its variable-ratio steering, but it feels quite familiar: heavy, with a sense of binding at the extremities. I don't love it, but it is geared quite sensibly and you're never in any doubt about what's going on.

So in short, the EV6 GT is an Ioniq 5 N with the edge taken off – an Ioniq 5 N Touring, if you will. That idea certainly has its appeal, but then I never thought the Hyundai was excessively punishing on the daily grind. The end result is that the EV6 GT, while really good fun in isolation, doesn't shine quite as brightly.

It seems to me that Kia could have taken the opportunity to enhance the EV6 GT's other grand tourer credentials – by improving the efficiency (probably with some less aggressive tyres) and giving it more range. But instead it has the same 279-mile range as the Ioniq 5 N.

I got about 2.7mpkWh in mixed on-road motoring, which equates to 216 miles, assuming 80kWh as the usable battery capacity.

Sure, the 250kW charging does facilitate long trips, but a 250-mile real-world range would have lent more credence to its GT billing.

The original EV6 GT felt like quite a significant car, and the Ioniq 5 N was a step on from there. This new EV6 GT feels like a variation rather than another decisive evolution: it lacks its own thing a little bit.

Mind you, there are much worse things to be than a slightly cheaper, slightly more comfortable Ioniq 5 N.

ILLYA VERPRAET

GT has quite a sporty look – but then so does the regular EV6

TECH SPEC

KIA EV6 GT

Comfier, faster and cheaper than before – but can't escape the shadow of that other fast Korean EV

Price £59,985
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 641bhp at 4600-10,400rpm
Torque 568lb ft at 0-7200rpm
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2200kg
0-62mph 3.5sec
Top speed 161mph
Battery 84.0/80.0kWh (total/usable, est)
Range, economy 279 miles, 3.0mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals BMW i4 M60, Hyundai Ioniq 5 N, Porsche Taycan Sport Turismo

TESTED 16.6.25, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND **DELIVERIES** NOW

FORD RANGER PHEV

Focus ST engine meets electric motor in best-selling pick-up truck

Ford's car strategy in Europe has undergone a major overhaul in recent years, the results of which are still playing out. But while this has been going on, the Blue Oval's sturdy commercial vehicle business has been holding the fort globally, delivering appealing vehicles and even more appealing profit margins.

Transits are still the default vans in each size group, the F-150 pick-up truck remains the best-selling vehicle in the US full stop (period?) and the smaller Ranger is the best-selling pick-up in 21 other nations, the UK among them. Some five million Rangers have been sold over the past two decades.

Ford has now created a plug-in hybrid version of the Ranger, which is a big deal, because PHEVs are back in fashion across Europe – and because the UK no longer treats double-cab pick-ups as light commercial vehicles when it comes to benefit-in-kind tax, so the rate here is 20%, compared with the full 37% for one of the diesel Rangers.

Importantly for Ford's outdoorsy and independently minded Ranger customers, this doesn't come at the expense of practicality: the PHEV can tow (3500kg) and carry (1049kg) similar weights to a diesel.

Okay, the load bed floor has been raised by 31mm to make room for the battery. But we can forgive the Ranger for that because of its new Ford Pro Power feature. This is essentially an electric generator with 2.3kW or 6.9kW of electrical output. It can power things like

Off-roading angles and wading depth aren't affected by electrification

an angle grinder if you're a tradie or can even be used to charge an EV, assuming you're not in a rush. Importantly, the 2.3-litre petrol four-banger can be used as a generator, so you don't actually need juice in the battery to charge something external.

This is the first time we have seen the 2.3-litre engine in UK-market Rangers. It's the same unit you will find under the bonnet of the retiring Focus ST but with a 101bhp electric motor and a 11.8kWh (usable) battery added for good measure.

Electric-only range is 26 miles. That doesn't sound like a great deal compared with the monster numbers that PHEV cars are capable of now, but Ford reckons most Ranger owners don't typically do this many miles in a day anyway.

Official economy is close to 100mpg. Insert usual caveat here. During a morning's worth of driving at 56mph with no battery charge, I achieved 35mpg, which isn't too bad.

In other applications, Ford's 10-speed gearbox is a touch indecisive. But in this, with a motor's help, it's a delight. Movements up and down are pretty smooth and are performed without much hesitancy. Flooring the accelerator is met by an accompanying shift down of two or three gears, rather than four or five and an accompanying and awkward one or two back up. And if you still think there are too many ratios to choose from, you can manually cancel a few using the buttons on the side of the shifter.

"Ford's 10-speed gearbox can be indecisive, but here, with a motor's help, it's a delight"

Battery weight over rear axle has improved ride quality

The Ranger PHEV certainly isn't slow: 277bhp means it's more powerful than the 3.0-litre V6 diesel and torque is a faintly ludicrous 514lb ft. Of course, these figures are only achievable when there's enough charge in the battery, but if not, the drop-off in performance, while noticeable, isn't too bad.

The PHEV's battery sits at the front of the load bed. It has a unique suspension tune and re-engineered frame rails to cope with the extra weight, and if anything the ride is a touch less jittery than in a diesel Ranger. It's well known that pick-ups benefit from having some kind of cargo in the rear, after all.

The steering is unchanged, meaning it's very light and a touch imprecise. Pick-up noobs might be surprised by how much wheel shuffling you need to do in order to perform a U-turn. But it's much more car-like than its rivals still.

There's a certain circularity to this PHEV, because the Ranger was invented in 1982 to provide pick-up owners with a more cost-effective alternative to the gargantuan F-150.

Most Rangers are sold in a middling or high spec, so it's not wild to imagine people spending good money on a PHEV, where you can tool around in electric mode, not disturbing anyone. Ford shows some good savings too: UK owners could knock around £1000 off their fuel costs per year if they charge a PHEV from home on a cheap tariff.

But traditional pick-up owners – farmers etc – and probably also the kind of people who buy those slightly absurd Deranged Rangers would just prefer the ease of diesel.

MURRAY SCULLION

TESTER'S NOTE

I managed to charge a Ford Mustang Mach-E Rally from the Ranger PHEV's Pro Power system. It would take about an hour to get from 5-10%. Useful in a snag, I guess. **MSc**

TECH SPEC

FORD RANGER 2.3 TIVCT ECOBOOST PHEV WILDTRAK

Wonderfully car-like and tough, but a diesel would be easier to live with

Price £44,900
Engine 4 cyls in line, 2261cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 277bhp at 4600rpm
Torque 514lb ft at 2700rpm
Gearbox 10-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2615kg
0-62mph 9.2sec
Top speed na
Battery 11.8kWh (usable)
Economy 91.1mpg
Electric range 26 miles
CO_2, tax band 71g/km, 20%
Rivals Toyota Hilux, Volkswagen Amarok

TESTER'S NOTE
Bentley has work to do on the brake feel with these new PHEVs. Regeneration inevitably introduces a softness, which is entirely at odds with the traditional Bentley sense of mechanical connection. **RL**

TESTED 7.6.25, BOZEMAN, MONTANA, US **DELIVERIES** AUTUMN

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

Standard coupé is now a PHEV and in essence a downtuned Speed

For this latest Continental GT, Bentley has broken with convention and got things going with a bang. In the past, we have had to wait a short while for the excesses of the Speed derivative, but for the Mk4 car it was the first one out of the factory and into showrooms. Here's the new 208mph Conti GT, they said. It will outdrag a Ferrari Enzo yet cruise more quietly than the latest Mercedes-AMG S63. Satisfied?

If the goal was to make a statement, job done. We can now move onto the model that most owners will opt for: the 'regular' Conti GT, which is of course nothing of the sort. In fact, the entry-level car is mechanically closer to the Speed than ever.

Both cars use the same V8-engined plug-in hybrid powertrain (detuned from 771bhp in Ultra Performance Hybrid form to merely 671bhp as the High Performance Hybrid). Both have the same Porsche-developed dual-clutch automatic gearbox, two-chamber air suspension, active anti-roll bars, rear steering and electronically controlled limited-slip differential, which plays a pivotal role in controlling the amount of torque that each side of the car gets.

This overlap is confirmed by the homologated weights: exactly 2384kg for each car. Of course, in terms of their calibration, all these systems are also tuned for less attack here than in the Speed (at least in Sport mode; the Goldilocks 'Bentley' setting is the same calibration range-wide).

The standard car's cabin, with its fine balance of digital and physical controls, is still stunningly opulent too – even more so if you opt for the panoramic roof. In fact, without the Dinamica trim of the Speed, it's a more compelling, elegant luxury space. As ever, you can also split the hide colours, merging the rear seats in with the door cards, with a contrasting colour for front seats so indulgently sculpted that they border on the soporific. Altering the focus in this way makes the Conti GT feel even more debonair.

For those who need the last word in deco-era chic, there's also the Azure model, which is recognisable by its neo-classical wheels, more prominent exterior brightwork and vertical grille slats (a look not all will love) and striking, parquet-style lacquered transmission-tunnel trim.

With 22.0kWh of battery capacity, it's not impossible to squeeze 50 miles of electric running out of a fully charged Conti GT, and in its Comfort and Bentley drive modes the car certainly tends towards silent locomotion when it can.

On good roads, the effect of silent cruising can be profoundly special; on poor surfaces, the powertrain silence throws road roar into relief a little too starkly. We would also be inclined to stick with the standard 21in wheels, to best curb the suspension's occasional reactivity.

Performance is massive. This powertrain can need a bit of a jab in the ribs to bring the engine into play, but when it does so it generally finds the right gear at the first time of asking. At this point the Conti GT is ready to drop just about anything you might find in its frameless rear-view mirror.

This isn't the most soulful outing for Bentley's V8 (the titanium exhaust-equipped pure-ICE system from the new Bentayga Speed isn't available in the coupé… yet), but it is monstrously effective, and the torque-fill effect you get from the 188bhp electric motor gives the car a fleet-footedness that belies that kerb weight. Just as well, because the old Conti GT, even with a 6.0-litre W12 in its snout, was 140kg lighter.

As for cost, the range starts at £202,000 – a considerable uplift over the old car, which you could get for less than £150,000 in 2019. The new car is quicker and more versatile, with electric power behind both improvements. Whether it's also more charming and engaging won't become clear until we drive one in the UK later this summer.

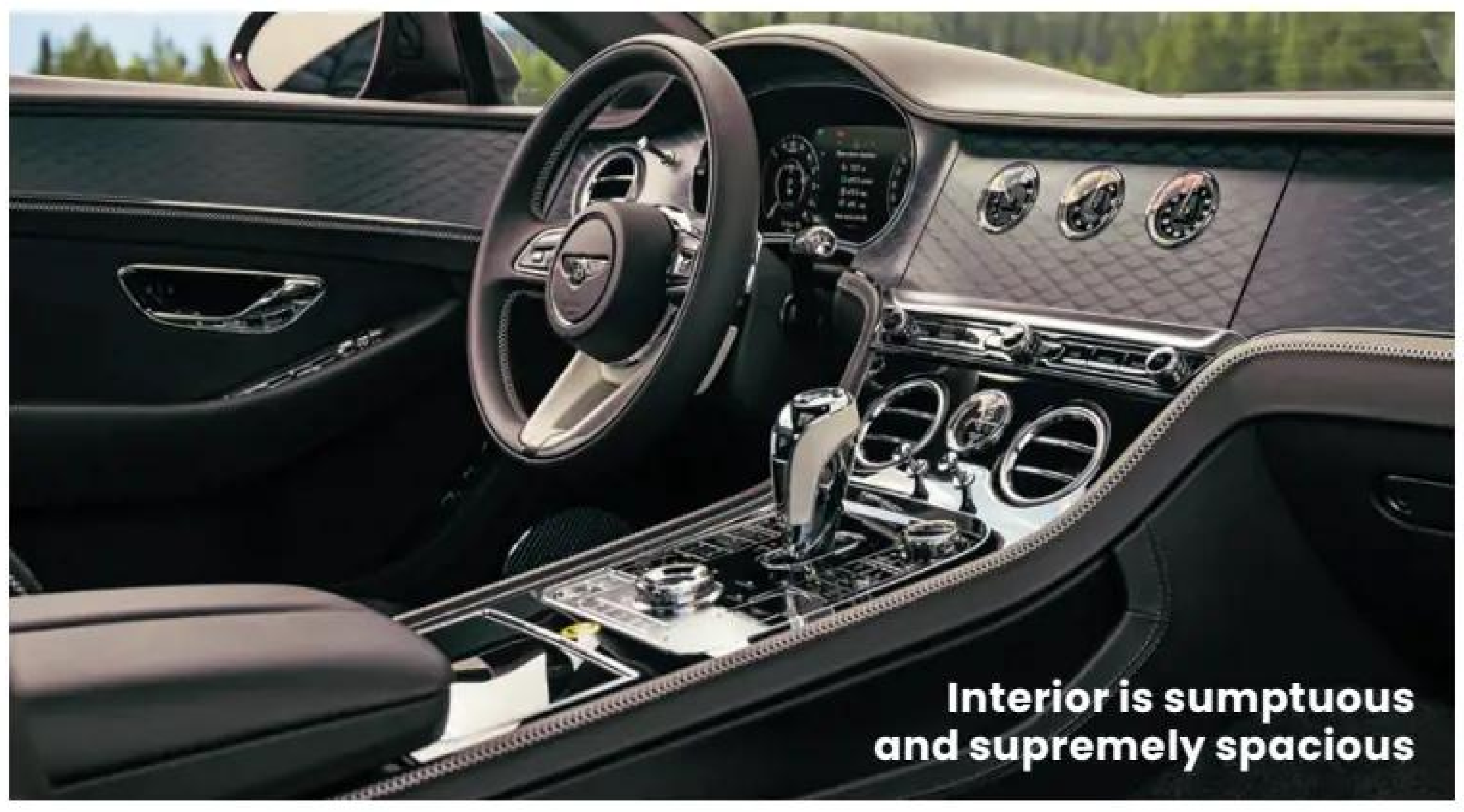
RICHARD LANE

TECH SPEC

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT V8 HYBRID

There's nothing entry-level about its performance or opulence, although the jury is still out on its dynamics

Price £202,400
Engine V8, 3996cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 671bhp at 6250rpm
Torque 686lb ft at 2300rpm
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2384kg
0-62mph 3.5sec
Top speed 168mph
Battery 25.9/22.0kWh (total/usable)
Economy 68.9mpg
Electric range na
CO_2, tax band 93g/km, 24%
Rivals Maserati Granturismo, Audi RS E-tron GT



Interior is sumptuous and supremely spacious

Conti GT is a touch longer now yet also has a smaller boot

TESTED 19.6.25, PARIS, FRANCE **DELIVERIES** AUGUST

RENAULT SYMBIOZ

Uprated hybrid system and new petrol manual option for Kia Niro rival

Renault's investment in hybrid technology shows no sign of abating. It has just given its mid-sized Symbioz crossover a powertrain update, adding the E-Tech Full Hybrid 160 system recently introduced in the Dacia Bigster Hybrid and a mild-hybrid petrol. The car is otherwise as it was.

The full hybrid tested here gets a combined 158bhp from a 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol engine and two electric motors (a 48bhp drive motor and a 20bhp ISG). For reference, its predecessor (badged 145) received 141bhp from a 1.6-litre engine and a 52bhp electric motor.

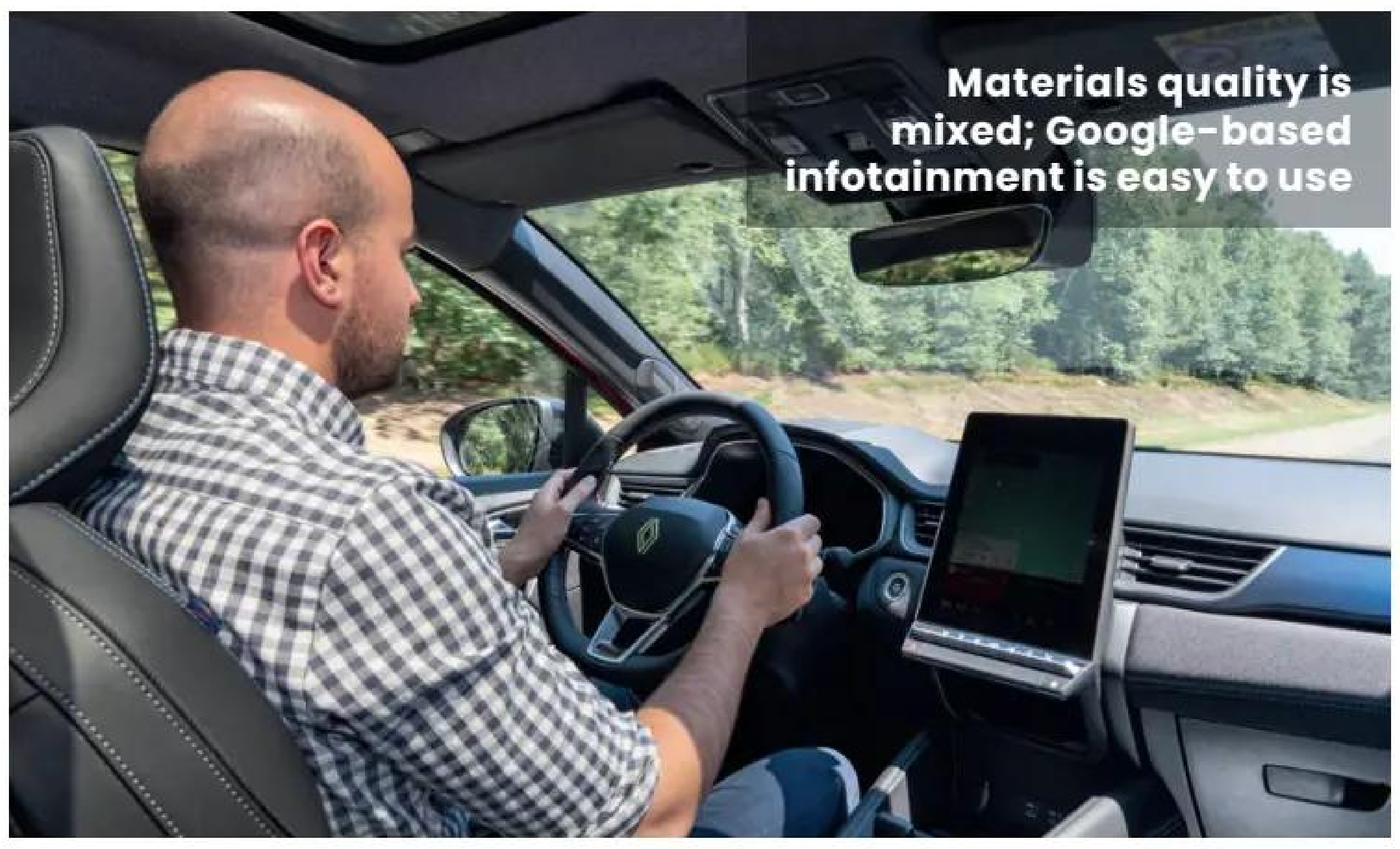
Despite the increase in power and engine capacity, this powertrain produces less CO_2, at 97g/km, which means it gets a 25% benefit-in-kind tax rating – 1% lower than before.

The motors draw their power from a 1.4kWh battery, which is 0.14kWh larger than the old one, so you can run on electricity for longer periods, making journeys quieter and more economical, particularly at town speeds. As such, Renault claims the engine uses 5% less fuel than before.

When the engine is roused, it stays quiet and smooth, and the transition between electric and combustion power is seamless.

Renault has recalibrated its 'multimodal' automatic gearbox for smoother shifting, so this car is noticeably less jerky than the old Symbioz hybrid, more accurately responding to your inputs – although it still occasionally hangs onto ratios for too long.

There's no perceptible difference in ride between the two new versions


Materials quality is mixed; Google-based infotainment is easy to use

Performance has been improved too, with 0-62mph now taking 9.1sec – 1.5sec less than before. Where the old car felt slow, strained and noisy when accelerating, this feels much stronger and more comfortable in its skin.

Yet despite this, claimed fuel economy is slightly better too, at 65.7mpg on the WLTP combined cycle. In the real world, my test car averaged an impressive 64.2mpg.

This becomes more impressive when you consider the price. Starting at £29,795, this Symbioz is one of the cheapest hybrids in its class, coming in at around £500 less than the equivalent Kia Niro, £1000 down on the Hyundai Kona and £1800 below the Toyota C-HR.

The new mild-hybrid Symbioz is also one of the cheapest among its contemporaries. Starting from £27,395, it's around £2000 less than the equivalent Skoda Karoq or Nissan Qashqai – and yet it doesn't feel less expensive to drive or sit in.

Power comes from a 1.3-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol engine with a gearbox-mounted electric motor for a combined 138bhp. The powertrain is impressively refined and has just enough poke for most situations, although I suspect it would begin to flounder if you weighed it down with a family and their luggage.

If you're going to be using your Symbioz for that, I would recommend the more powerful full hybrid, as the extra power will mean it won't have to work as hard, so fuel economy should be better.

The mild hybrid sends its power to the front wheels via a six-speed manual gearbox. The shift action is woollen and vague but the clutch pedal has an intuitive, positive action that's easy to get used to.

In my time with it, the mild hybrid returned 43mpg, slightly down on the official 47.9mpg.

The mild hybrid is available in the UK only in base Techno trim, but this has all the equipment you really need, from a 10.2in infotainment touchscreen to a rear-view camera and wireless smartphone mirroring.

The full hybrid comes in Techno, Techno Esprit Alpine and Iconic Esprit Alpine trims, the last two of those adding sporty design trinkets and a better stereo system. Again, Techno trim is your safest bet.

For the best combination of performance and economy, I would recommend the full hybrid, but crucially both new versions of the Symbioz are creditable cars. With a class-leading 624-litre boot capacity, they're spacious as well as being economical and very well priced.

JONATHAN BRYCE

TECH SPEC

RENAULT SYMBIOZ E-TECH FULL HYBRID 160 ICONIC ESPRIT ALPINE

Appeal of refined, spacious and well-priced crossover has been broadened by new powertrains

Price £33,795
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1798cc, petrol, plus electric motor and 48V ISG
Power 158bhp
Torque 276lb ft
Gearbox 4-spd automatic (engine), 2-spd automatic (motor), FWD
Kerb weight 1393kg
0-62mph 9.1sec
Top speed 105mph
Economy 65.7mpg
CO_2, tax band 97g/km, 25%
Rivals Hyundai Kona, Peugeot 2008

TESTER'S NOTE

The full-hybrid Symbioz now has a towing capacity of 1000kg, up from 750kg, making it slightly more suitable for caravan holidays to the south of France. **JB**

ROAD TEST
R20 GWD

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5756**

ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST

Facelifted junior Rolls gains the sporting flavour of a Black Badge fettling

MODEL TESTED
ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST SERIES II BLACK BADGE
Price £337,545
Power 592bhp at 5250rpm
Torque 664lb ft at 1700rpm
0-60mph 4.5sec
30-70mph 3.6sec
Top speed 155mph (claimed)
Average economy 18.1mpg
Touring economy 25.8mpg
CO$_2$ emissions 348-359g/km
70-0mph 44.5m (15deg C, dry)

With this week's road test, we check in on the latest developments concerning two of Rolls-Royce's more popular modern inventions. The Ghost limousine – now on sale as a facelifted Series II take on its second-generation form – is the first of them and the anti-traditional Black Badge derivative phenomenon is the other.

The Ghost first arrived in 2009 as a slightly smaller, more usable and less formal foil for the traditional Phantom. It broadened Rolls-Royce's customer base significantly and also attracted a significantly younger audience.

That car became one of the first to receive a Black Badge design treatment, in 2016. Intended as an effective counterpoint to the more traditional luxury design idioms of the firm's 'mainstream' models, Black Badge variants adopt subversive, alternative materials and features to appeal to buyers less enamoured of the 'age of grandeur' that Rolls-Royce has typically catered to and more motivated by contemporary design trends.

The Black Badge Rolls-Royce has proven a commercial success and now accounts for 25% of the firm's sales volume. With this Ghost Series II, it takes a subtle but significant development step in sporting character and engineering scope. The resulting car has been described by its maker as the most agile and driver-focused limousine the firm has created. Stand by to find out what, precisely, that means.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★½

PROS Subversive-looking but not OTT; some hardware and chassis mods lift the application of 'Black Badge' above the cosmetic
CONS No more power than the pre-facelift Black Badge

Launched in 2020, the second-generation Ghost has become a key technological demonstrator for Rolls-Royce. The first-generation car was criticised for its adoption of a BMW Group model platform and V12 engine, but the second could hardly have been more different.

It uses Rolls-Royce's own Architecture of Luxury (an all-aluminium spaceframe-style chassis) and a different version of the 6.75-litre V12 that powers the Phantom, but it also blooded an innovative Planar active air suspension system. This not only adapts its spring and damper calibration for the road surface ahead based on input from a camera (technology that, in inimitable fashion reminiscent of motoring's earliest days, Rolls-Royce calls 'Flagbearer') but also has dedicated mass damper countermeasures on both axles intended to absorb lateral shocks that might otherwise disturb the car's ride.

First Ghost netted Rolls younger buyers

The Ghost uses active all-wheel drive and active four-wheel steering. The former feature, just like the active suspension system, isn't offered on the more expensive Phantom.

Aside from introducing some new wheel designs, Rolls-Royce hasn't changed the regular Ghost's running chassis specification for the Series II version, but it has come up with a new and special Black Badge calibration of the Planar suspension. So the tuning of the steering, adaptive damping and ride height have been subtly reappraised for improved body control and greater driver engagement.

The Black Badge model continues to use the 'high-power' version of the Ghost's 6.75-litre twin-turbocharged V12, producing 592bhp and 664lb ft here, just as it did in the pre-facelift Ghost Black Badge (up from 564bhp and 627lb ft in the standard model). The Black Badge's eight-speed automatic gearbox can execute shifts 50% quicker than the regular car's, when more than 90% throttle is being applied, and it has an active exhaust system for more audible drama.

In terms of its appearance, this also becomes the first Black Badge Rolls with redesigned body features, rather than simply different body trim. The Ghost Series II has revised headlights and tail-lights to mark it out, as well as some subtle new chrome front bumper trim, but the Black Badge gets a wider, lower front air dam with specially designed outer air intakes that feed more cooling air through to the front brakes.

INTERIOR

★★★★½

PROS Balances the stately with the informal brilliantly; now hints at the performance aesthetic too
CONS Material quality, although very high, isn't quite exceptional

The Ghost continues to tread a careful line between largeness and what many might consider excessive vastness. The car doesn't stand as tall at the kerb as the more imposing Phantom so, although long, doesn't have the kind of bulk that gives you pause for thought as you approach and then tug on the outsized handle of one of its 'coach' doors. It's big – but not extraordinarily so.

From behind the wheel, you will find the cabin's proportions conventional. Large, soft, broadly adjustable and suitably comfortable, the front seats offer abundant leg room and a hip point of fairly saloon-typical height.

■ Black Badge gets its own front bumper styling with this enlarged air dam, which, at its lateral extremes, provides extra cooling to the front brakes. It looks like it means business too.

■ Polished black door handles and window trim also set the car apart. With the driver's door open, the former sticks out at just the right height to catch your elbow as you climb out of the car, but it's hardly a serious design flaw.

Even in the Black Badge, the steering wheel remains large, with a slim, studiously round rim. Rolls-Royce's preference for simple, traditional primary controls makes for an elegantly slender column shifter transmission control stalk, and an indicator wand matching in its lissom svelteness. Even here, there are no paddle shifters for manual gearbox control, though. On the digital instrument screen, Rolls' famous 'power reserve' dial is in its familiar place, so there's no rev counter, either. These are your first clues that, while a dusting of extra driver appeal may be in the offing, some things are sacrosanct.

However, it's hard to imagine a regular-series Ghost would sport a colour combination like our test car's Phoenix Red on black leather, a no-cost option. Added to this, the Black Badge comes with what its maker describes as 'Technical Fibre' cabin trim: a bolivar wood with layers of carbonfibre and metal leaf and polished to a lusty sheen. It not only catches the eye but also skilfully balances modern performance appeal and Rolls-Royce's typical traditional craftsmanship.

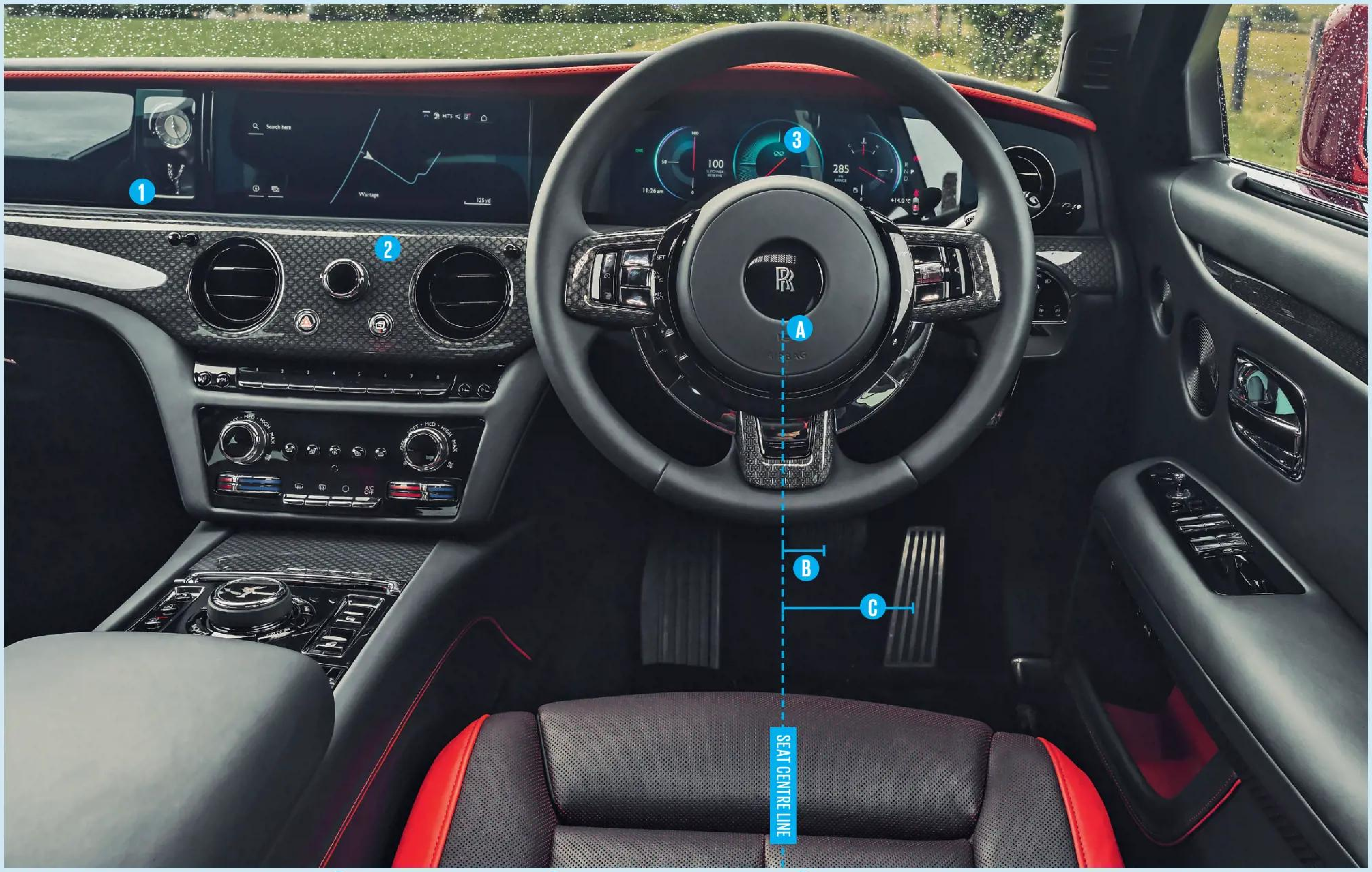
In the back, our test car had occupant space typical of a large limousine but was no bigger. (An Extended model 170mm longer ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

① This glass display case, with its miniature Spirit of Ecstasy figurine, has been added to the fascia of Ghost Series II models. Like the one on the bonnet, it's uplit for added visual appeal.

② 'Black Badge Technical Fibre' is the default trim choice: a mix of interlaced carbonfibre and metal thread that really does catch the eye. Bespoke alternatives are, of course, possible.

③ Black Badge brand symbol is a take on the mathematical symbol for infinity, hinting at the boundless impression of torque that the car's V12 engine creates.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 70mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 195mm right. Right-sided offset of the pedals is a little pronounced and could be slightly problematic for shorter-legged drivers but wasn't for us.

◂ in the wheelbase can still be had if you desire more.) Even so, its motorised rear-hinged coach doors and set-back seats still conjured lots of grandness and sense of occasion. Visibility isn't great because of the chunky roof pillars, but most passengers we drove said they appreciated the resultant sense of being cocooned.

The boot is big by saloon standards. It's a little narrow but would be more than 1.2m long if you did without Rolls-Royce's back-row drinks chiller and could swallow bulky luggage easily.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★★½

PROS Physical cursor controller, with lots of shortcut keys, makes for great usability while driving
CONS Not a car for the consumer electronics junkie

The Ghost's infotainment system, called Spirit, has had an update for the Series II facelift but it retains a particularly old-school control regime. Rolls-Royce's iDrive-style physical rotary input device continues on the transmission tunnel, surrounded by various menu shortcuts, and the same line of eight user-configurable chrome shortcut keys remains in place just under the screen.

So while the screen can be operated by touch, more often than not you find your way around it via other means and, with a little time to set up preferences, it's really easy to use and not distracting at all. There are physical heating and ventilation controls, too, so the system doesn't feel over-burdened.

For those in the rear seats, our test car came with individual multimedia displays built in behind its motorised picnic tables and each can stream media from a different wired device and connect to a different set of wireless headphones, if necessary.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★½

PROS Supremely smooth drivability; exceptional mechanical refinement
CONS Not as quick as top-level modern super-saloons (though neither, probably, should it be)

The magic of a modern Rolls-Royce in motion is encapsulated perfectly by its first 20 yards or so – and that magic isn't compromised one jot by this Black Badge execution.

The Ghost's V12 engine catches with only the very faintest whine of starter motor and then settles into a faultlessly smooth and quiet idle. Squeeze the accelerator and the car's super-progressive pedal tuning, combined with the most lusciously decadent engagement of the gearbox's torque converter, makes you feel more like you're easing an expensive powerboat away from its moorings than actually connecting a piston engine to two driven axles. It's a bit like driving through treacle but in the most agreeable way imaginable.

There is very little you can actually do to make a car like that feel like it's hurrying off the mark. Select the car's Low transmission setting and there's just a little more urgency about the way the Ghost ushers in its drive forces – not to mention just a dash of extra V12 vocality from the engine, which takes on an audible tone distantly redolent of a pack of pedigree draught horses braying at the reins.

But even here, when you build torque up against the brake pedal and then launch it from stationary, the 4.5sec 0-60mph time you will record still fails to trouble the car's traction at all. Clearly, Rolls-Royce could have shaved plenty from that but its decision not to reveals plenty about the subtlety with which it's courting added dynamism and excitement here.

Keep your foot planted hard and the Ghost Black Badge certainly feels – and is – fast. Though it's not a match in outright terms for the Bentley Flying Spur Speed we tested earlier this year, the way it squats on its hind quarters, allowing the front axle and steering to become slightly light as it forges beyond 100mph, makes for an abundant sense of speed. The lightness of that steering doesn't develop enough to corrupt the car's stability. But it's enough to make you think about where and how often you would fully uncork what is, after all, a 2.5-tonne luxury saloon that's quicker – from 70mph and beyond – than the last Volkswagen Golf R that we tested in 2021.

Would you enjoy yourself more if you could select gears 'manually'? We would argue yes – mostly to control precisely when and how forcefully the automatic gearbox elects to shift down under plenty of power, but also to develop an even more meaningful connection to what is a really enticing V12 engine.

As it is, Rolls-Royce's perennial preoccupation with producing what feels like an infinitely torquey 'one gear' style of performance for this car costs it just a little potential driver appeal where more could otherwise be had.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★⯪

PROS Beguiling steering; superbly level and settled country road ride
CONS Doesn't have the outright balance or agility of a smaller, lighter, less luxurious super-saloon

When we road tested the second-generation Ghost in 2021, it was its ever-predictable handling and enticing steering that impressed us most. Four years on, those dynamic strengths remain in place in this Black Badge version and are still intoxicatingly convincing in such a large and heavy car that's lovely to stroke along at a just-so seven-and-a-half-tenths pace.

This Ghost certainly has a more level and uncannily settled country road ride in Black Badge form than it has as standard, however, and, when working at its best, also seems to put its active suspension to better use to dial out the lateral body movements that cause head toss.

Duality is key to this car's dynamic appeal. Leave the Black Badge in its standard transmission mode and its ride comfort is pervading and convincing, its isolation from the road surface at times eerily good.

It doesn't quite waft with the long, languid, vertical movements of a Phantom. But there is an ever-fluent sort of breathing to the way the Ghost hovers above most roads and a real sense of glide about how it absorbs most asymmetrical inputs as they hit one side of the axles or the other. You can hear these distantly but you just don't feel them as you expect to and the rock-roll bodily reaction you expect of a softly sprung limousine simply never materialises. Except, that is, for rare but noticeable occasions when a mid-corner sharp edge hit with a loaded wheel appears to catch the Planar suspension out and make it seem to freeze slightly.

Hit Low transmission mode and you can feel a little of that breathing compliance dialled out of the ride and sense greater weight to the otherwise light but consistent steering. But that's it. There's no extra directness to the pace of the four-wheel steering and no more alertness to the car's laid-back, long-wheelbase chassis response. Because a Rolls is a Rolls and must always be stately and serene, even when going quickly.

Hurry this car along faster still and you will soon find a pace it isn't comfortable maintaining, as steady-state understeer builds and damping support at that soft rear axle wanes. But for a big, wide, heavy saloon with clear priorities, the Ghost Black Badge can be driven keenly and it is enjoyable when you respect its boundaries, but it is always an uncompromising luxury proposition.

TRACK NOTES

★★★☆☆

PROS Has the grip and body control to cope at a canter
CONS Communicates its heft and brief by understeering plenty beyond that pace

Driving a Rolls-Royce on a circuit feels like an offence that ought to be punishable by detention in the Tower. Even this Rolls-Royce, with its subtly lifted dynamic ambitions, ultimately reveals the sacrifices made in order to produce such an accomplished on-road ride.

The Black Badge has the power and mechanical grip to be driven quite quickly around a lap. But, at the limit of that grip, it's subject to the kind of steady-state understeer that wouldn't afflict an equivalent Bentley or Mercedes because such a softly set rear axle, necessary to make this car as comfortable as it is, simply gives the Ghost's front axle less to push against.

The electronic stability and traction control systems work well, and with subtlety, to keep it in safe, untroubled dynamic waters. But if you turn them off (and you can), the car's limits come quite early and aren't to be bargained with.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Prices remain broadly consistent, albeit high; big fuel tank enables creditable touring range
CONS No emissions-saving, economy-boosting hybrid tech

Ghost prices rose quite sharply when Rolls-Royce replaced the old BMW-based model with the second-generation one in 2020. But then the car that replaced the old Ghost was rather a different beast technically, and since Rolls-Royce buyers tend not to quibble – or even take a passing interest – over pounds, shillings and pence, little notice was taken.

Now, list prices have increased only slightly with the Series II facelift: somewhere between £4000 and £8000, depending on model, on a car that's unlikely to yield a final transaction price of less than £300,000 in any guise. So in the strictest sense, this remains Rolls' 'affordable' model, but it would be pointless to describe it as such. A Black Badge comes at a premium of just under £50,000 compared with the regular model. (For an Extended Wheelbase, it's £30,000.)

Our test car, meanwhile, returned a touring fuel economy test result of just under 26mpg and has a 90-litre fuel tank, so its real-world 500-mile cruising range ought to make it just as suited to continental touring as its roomy boot does. ▶

FRONT Leg room 1120mm, head room 1020mm. Plenty of space for drivers of all shapes and sizes to find comfort here. Wheel adjusts widely.

REAR Leg room 840mm, head room 950mm. Space here doesn't eclipse that of most big luxury saloons, but the lavish ambience does.

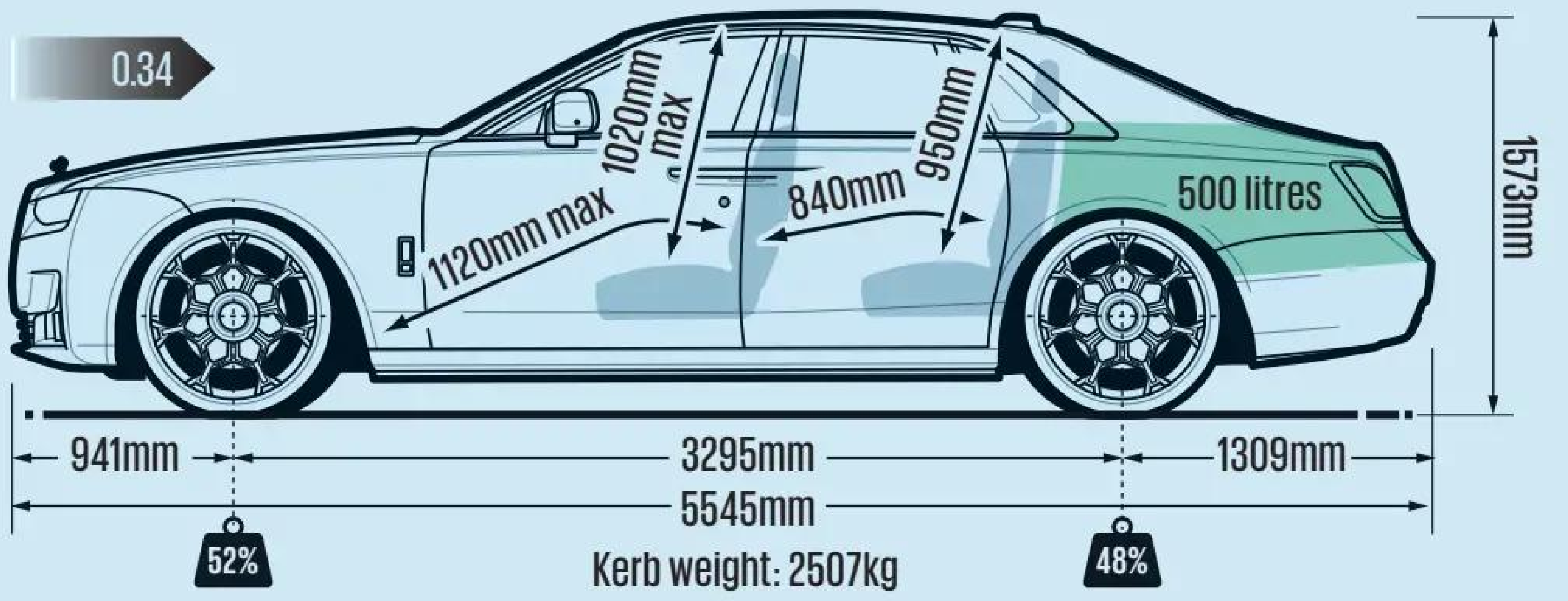
BOOT Length 910-1225mm, width 760-1360mm, height 520mm. No folding seatbacks and the optional drinks cooler robs a little volume, but still plenty.

"You feel like you're easing a powerboat from its moorings"

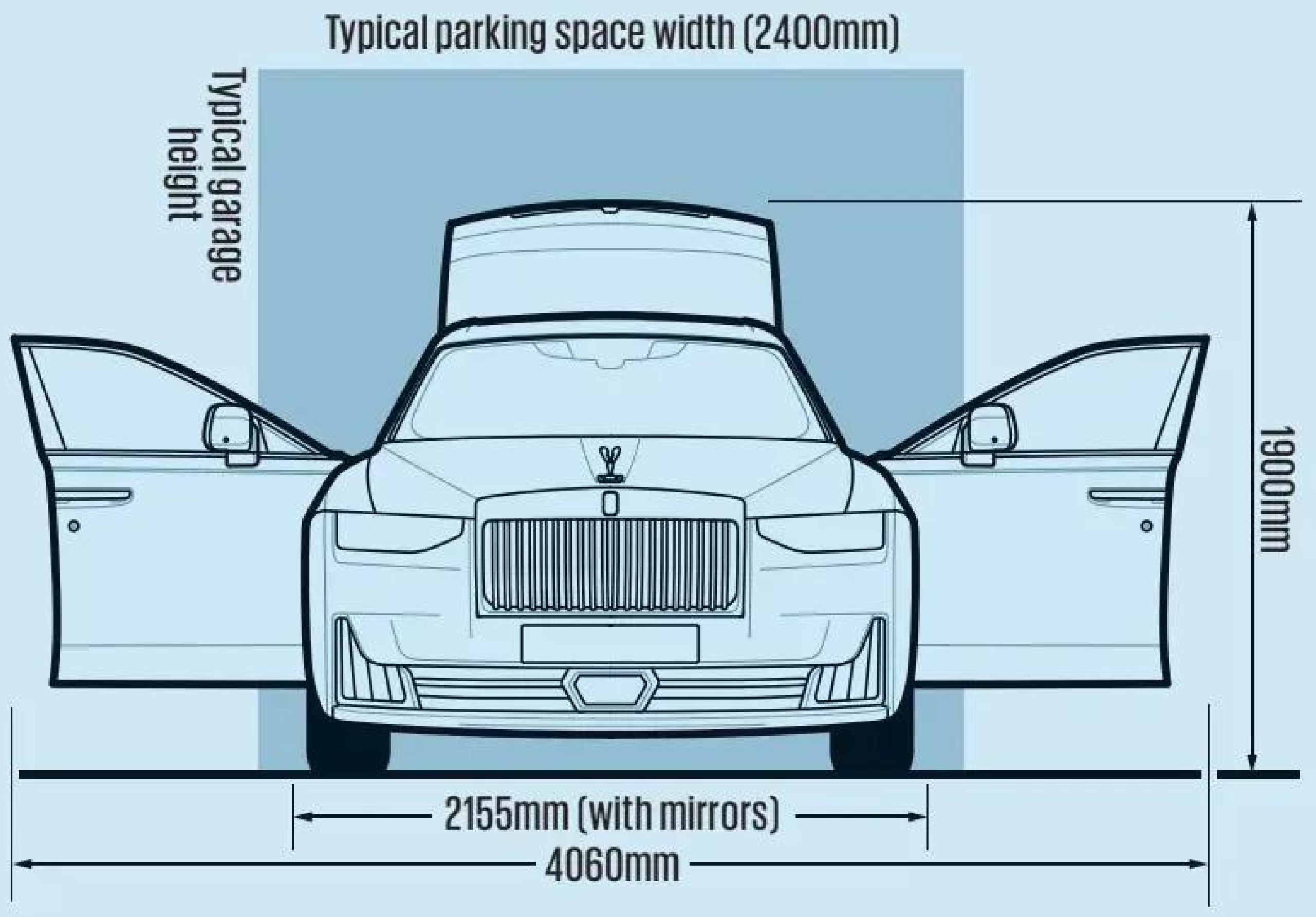
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 5558mm **Width** 2155mm/1998mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1573mm
Door span 4060mm **Max height to open bootlid** 1900mm

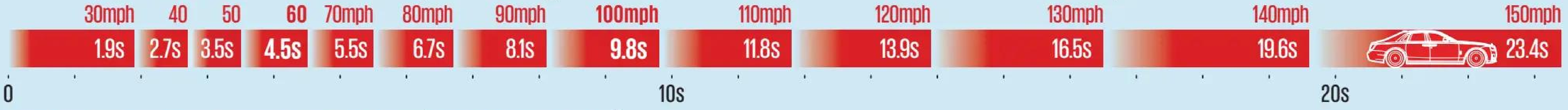

0.34
1120mm max
1020mm max
840mm
950mm
500 litres
1573mm
941mm
3295mm
1309mm
5545mm
52%
48%
Kerb weight: 2507kg

PARKING

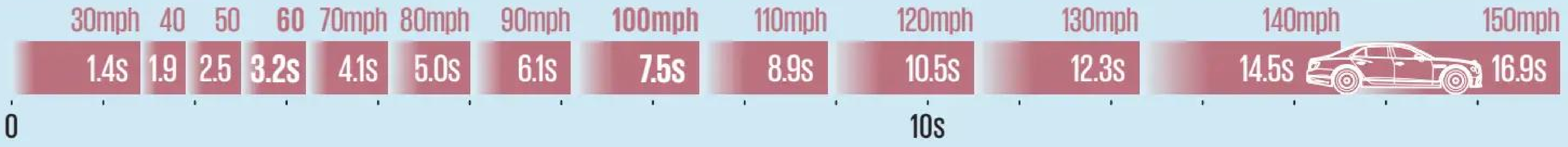

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
1900mm
2155mm (with mirrors)
4060mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 15deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 12.7sec at 114.6mph **Standing km** 22.8sec at 148.3mph **30-70mph** 3.6sec **50-80mph** 3.2sec **0-62mph** 4.7sec

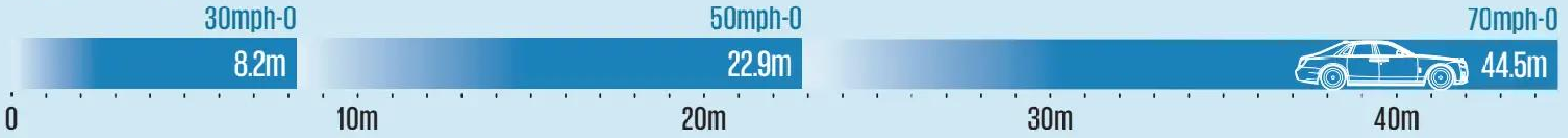


Bentley Flying Spur Speed First Edition (2025, 10deg C, dry)
Standing quarter mile 11.5sec at 125.8mph **Standing km** 20.7sec at 163.1mph **30-70mph** 2.7sec **50-80mph** 2.5sec

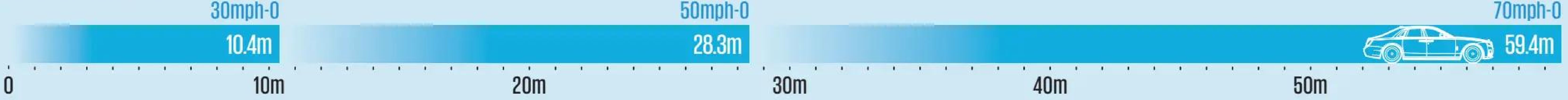


BRAKING

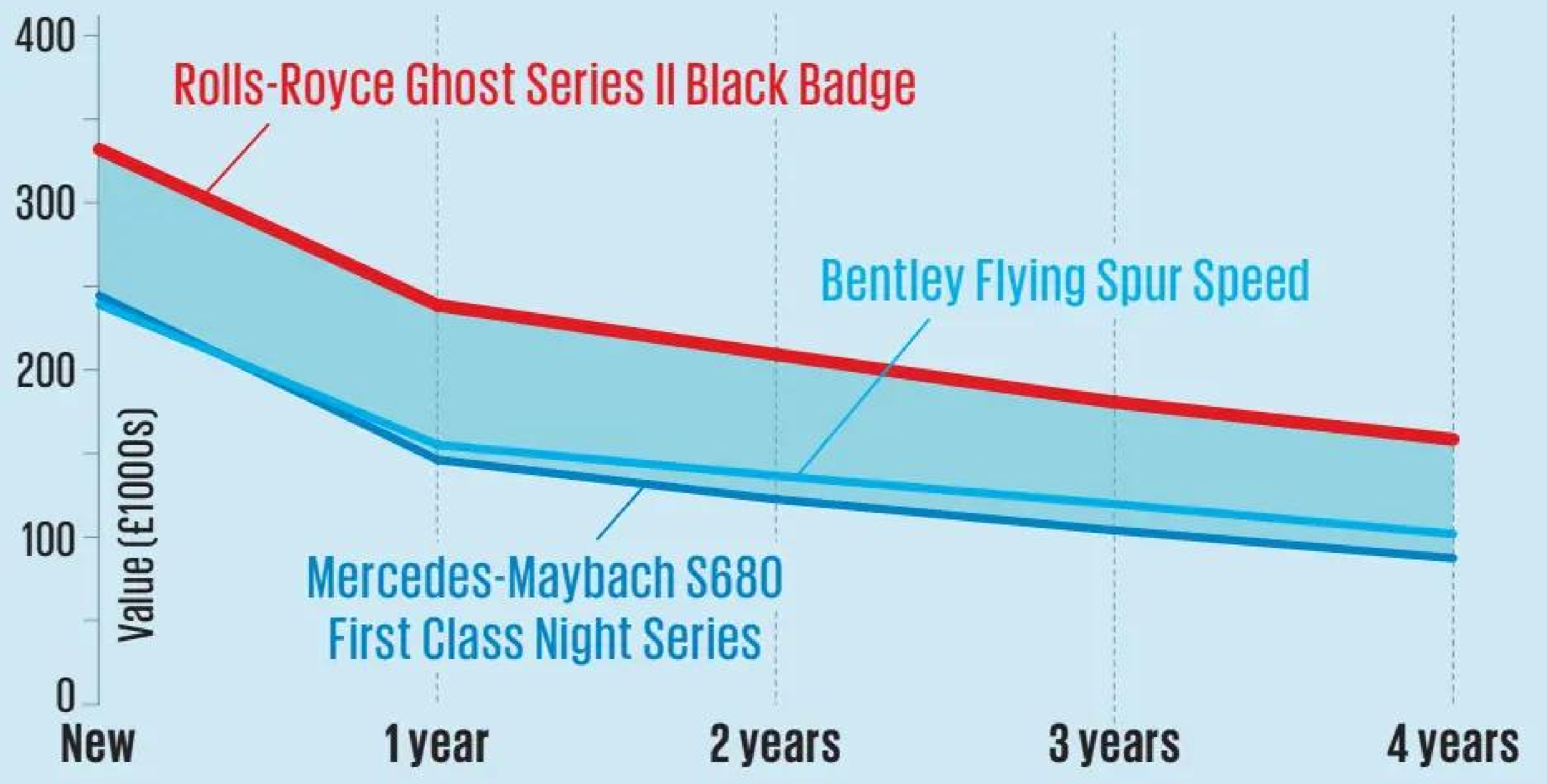
Dry 60-0mph 2.49sec



Wet 60-0mph 3.27sec

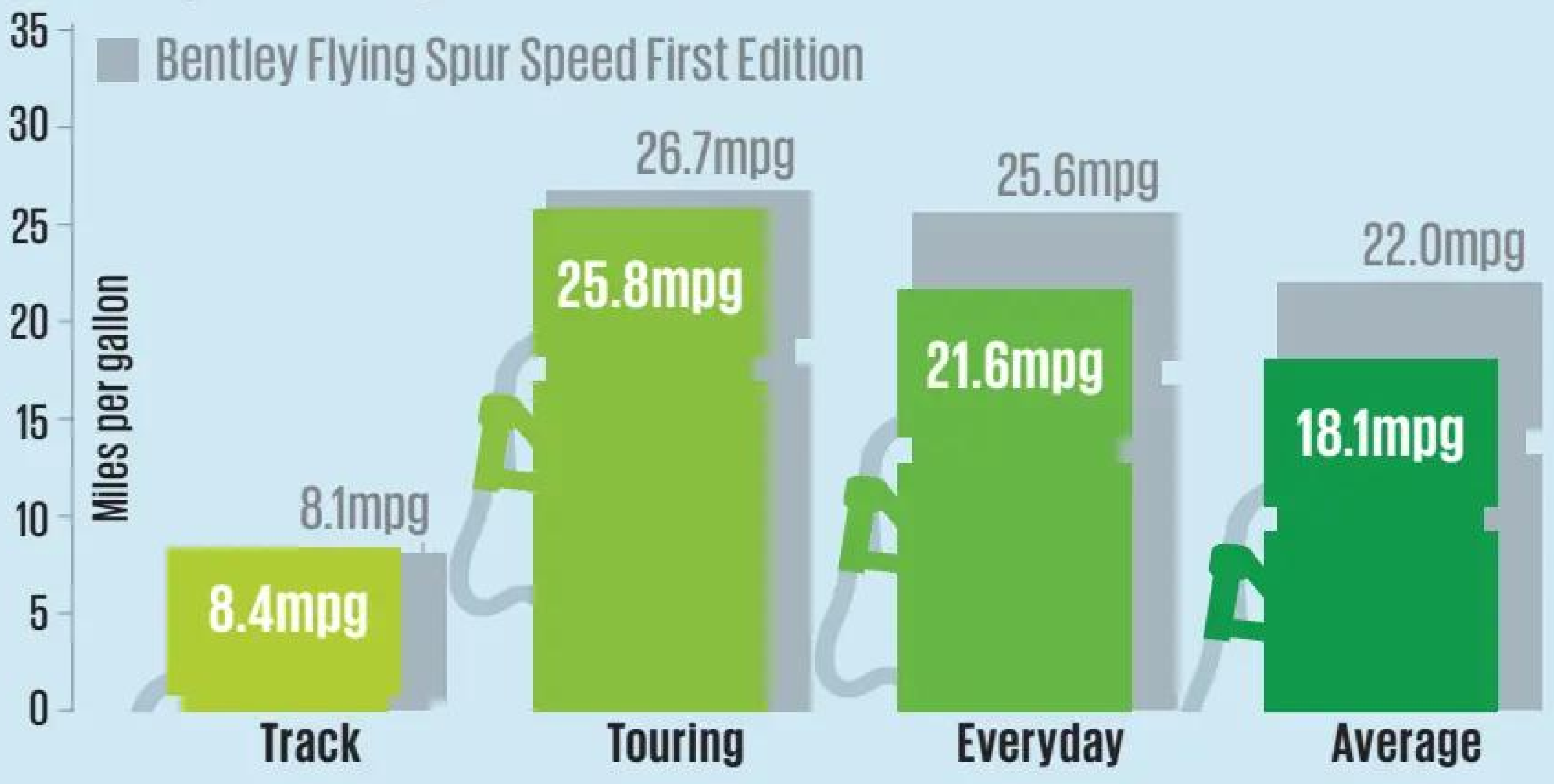


DEPRECIATION

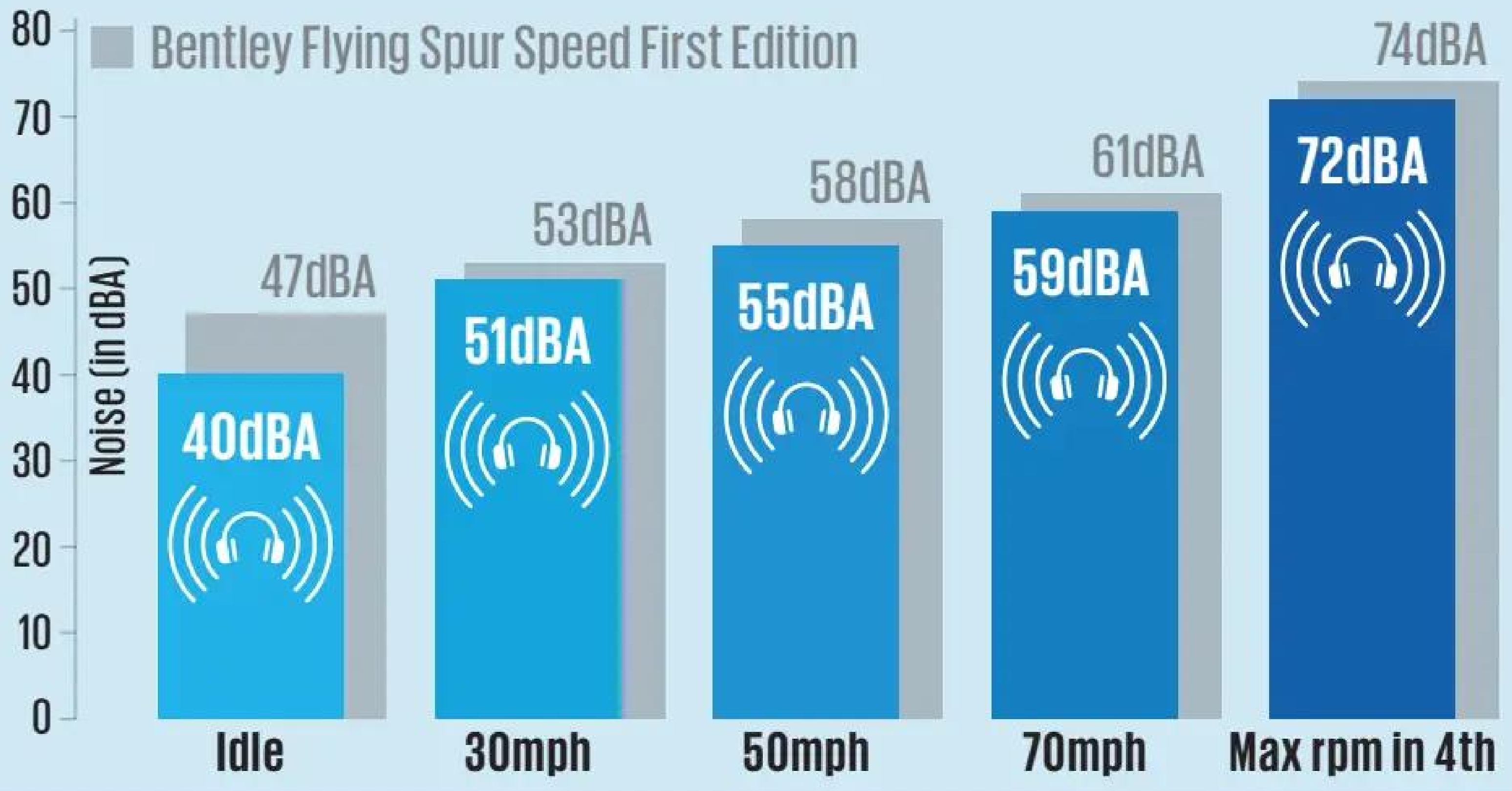


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 17.9-18.3mpg (combined) **Test range** 358/511/428 miles (average/touring/everyday)

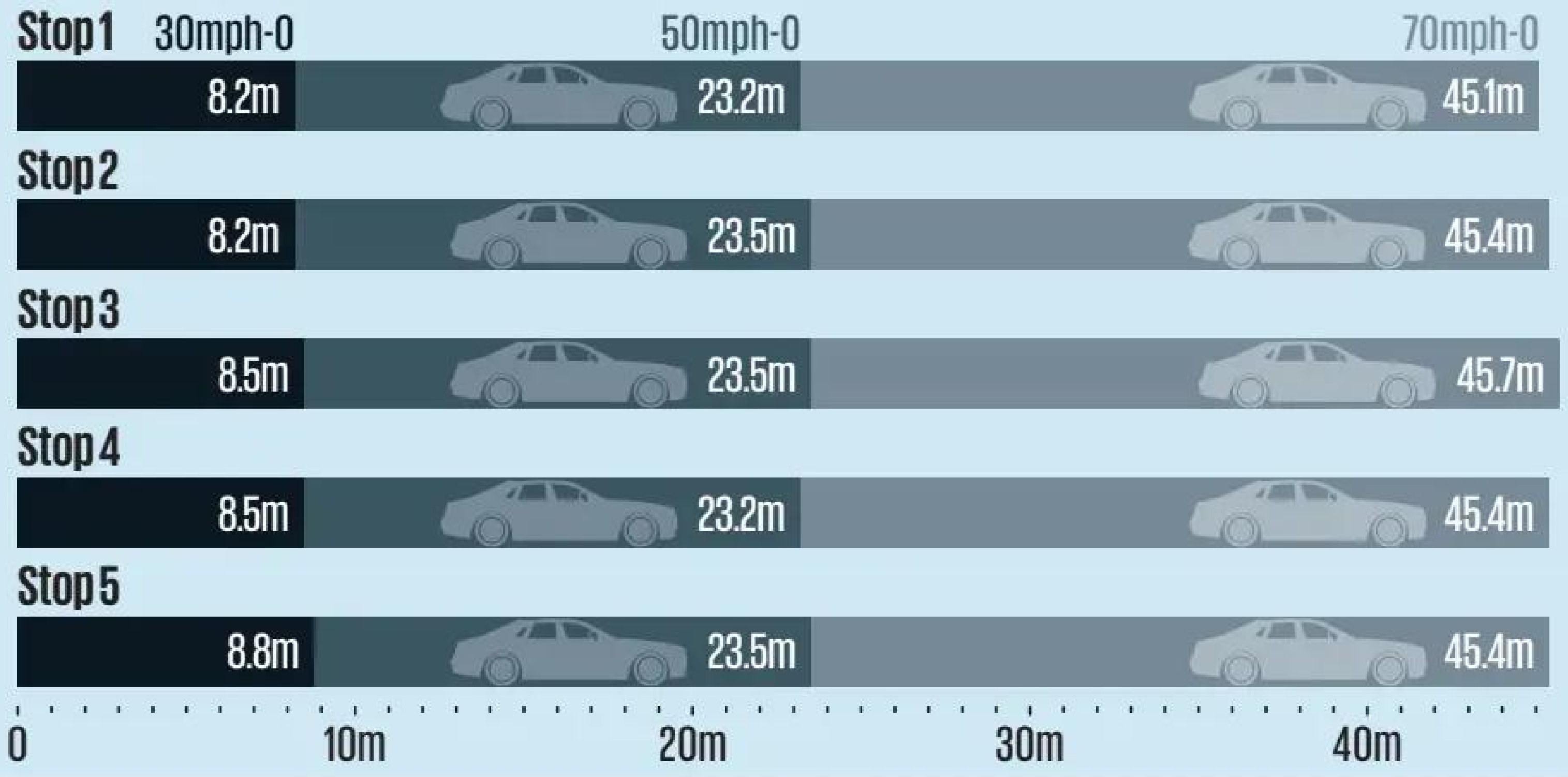


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 0.3m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST SERIES II BLACK BADGE

On-the-road price £337,545
Price as tested na
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £180,625
Contract hire/typical PCP na
Insurance group 50

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 22in alloy wheels, LED matrix headlights, illuminated grille, four-zone climate control, heated massage rear seats, dark chrome exterior body trim
Optional Magma Red paint £9960, drinks cooler in rear £2670, picnic tables in rear £4950, Shooting Star headliner £15,090
Also available Gold-plated Spirit of Ecstasy figurine £9780

ENGINE

Installation Front, longitudinal, 4WD
Type V12, 6749cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power 592bhp at 5250rpm
Torque 664lb ft at 1700rpm
Redline na
Specific output 88bhp per litre
Power to weight 236bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 265lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 8-spd automatic
Ratios/mph per 1000rpm
1st 5.00/6.1 **2nd** 3.20/9.5 **3rd** 2.14/14.2 **4th** 1.72/17.7 **5th** 1.31/23.2 **6th** 1.00/30.4 **7th** 0.82/37.1 **8th** 0.64/47.5
Final drive ratio 2.81:1 **rpm in top gear at 70/80mph** 1473/1684

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Aluminium monocoque and body
Weight/as tested 2507kg/2576kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 52%/48%
Drag coefficient 0.34
Wheels 9.0Jx22in (f), 10.5Jx22in (r)
Tyres 255/35 R22 102Y (f), 285/30 R22 104Y (r)
Spare None (run-flats)
Fuel tank 90 litres (behind rear seats, filler on offside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front Double wishbones, air springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, air springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion, with active 4WS; 2.7 turns lock to lock; 13.0m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 396mm ventilated discs, four-piston calipers
Rear Ventilated discs (size unspecified), single-piston calipers
Handbrake type Electronic, switch

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating Not tested

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 348-359g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm na

VERDICT

Flirts with sporting appeal while retaining its Rolls DNA

★★★★⯪

The very idea of a forgotten Rolls-Royce may be a little far-fetched but, in the era of the Spectre and Cullinan, it does feel as if that's the role the Ghost is fated to play. And it does so superbly – because it's usable, manageable and just a little understated, but also still grand, lavish, special and highly dynamically accomplished.

Perhaps that's why the Black Badge version works so well. It elevates this car's stature, develops its dynamic appeal and both modernises and subverts its kerbside presence.

We wondered before this test if it might turn out to be a wannabe super-saloon, but no: a Rolls-Royce can't pretend to be anything other than luxurious to its bones. Yet this one has just enough sporting seasoning to add to the overall appeal, without changing the guiding recipe – and we like it a lot.

TESTERS' NOTES

MATT SAUNDERS
Part of me wishes they had risked some closer gearbox control, and a rev counter, on this car but I also love the driving experience as it is. You can feel master of it without investing or expending any particular effort in enjoying it.

ILLYA VERPRAET
Does this car need automated doors? It feels quite odd to me to have to look for the button to close them and then wait while it happens. Give me a week and I reckon I'd be doing it the old-fashioned manual way in any case.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Modify the column-shifter so it can double as a rocker-style manual gear selector.
- Counteract rear-axle squat and front-axle lift under full power.
- Go even bigger with the V12 exhaust noise in Low mode.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4		
	ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST SERIES II BLACK BADGE	 **BENTLEY FLYING SPUR SPEED** Does sporting intent more seriously, and successfully, than the Ghost. Doesn't quite waft like it.	 **BMW i7 M70 xDRIVE** Precisely the kind of car that the Ghost isn't – avant-garde, techy, electric – but very good. Half the price, too.	 **MERCEDES-MAYBACH S680** Not in Rolls' league for ride comfort, but back-row 'sleeping seat' experience is special.	 **NIO ET9** More crossover than limo, but a showcase EV all the same. In the UK this year with 600kW charging and a 400-mile range.	 **AUDI A8 E-TRON** Grandsphere concept made real is set to be Ingolstadt's EV statement car when it arrives – no earlier than 2026.
		★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★⯪☆		
Price		£242,925	£164,265	£226,595	£100,000 (est)	£150,000 (est)
Power, torque		772bhp, 738lb ft	651bhp, 749lb ft	604bhp, 664lb ft	698bhp, 520lb ft	700bhp, 700lb ft (est)
0-62mph, top speed		3.5sec, 177mph	3.7sec, 155mph	4.5sec, 155mph	3.8sec, 124mph	4.0sec, 155mph
CO_2, economy		100g/km, 202mpg	0g/km, 2.9mpkWh	321g/km, 20.1mpg	0g/km, na	0g/km, na

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RICHARD LANE

Testing, testing

Unspoiled beauty: empty roads free of average-speed cameras

We're all guilty of it: cooing over glass-smooth Alpine passes and stretches of notionally empty autobahn while failing to appreciate that some of the planet's most captivating roads lurk on our doorstep. No, not J1-J2 of the M1 at 3am: Ireland.

Going for a spin in England and Wales purely for the thrill, joy or hell of it has become a faff. (I'm excluding Scotland here because, in general, it's still superb.) With 40 million licensed vehicles out there, the sheer volume of traffic is problematic. Then there's your friend and mine, the Jenoptik Vector P2P. These lurid yellow, high-resolution average-speed cameras are not only commonly seen on the motorways but are now increasingly dotted along some of our country's most scenic routes. I'm not condoning speeding here; what I'm saying is that it's damned near impossible to enjoy the ebb and flow of a good road when you are under constant scrutiny, which is distracting even when you're not driving in a manner your mother would disapprove of. As for potholes, we have plenty of those, but they're a universal evil. On a recent US launch, one of Bentley's comms chaps rued the fact two hugely expensive 23in rims 'wouldn't be coming home'. This on day one of a three-week event.

So, Ireland – both Northern and the Republic of. My eyes were opened to the delights of the latter in 2018 on the launch of the tweaked Mazda MX-5 (when the 2.0-litre engine went to 7000rpm). The back roads of Fermanagh (and of Leitrim and Donegal just over the border) were close to the Platonic ideal of a B-road. They were well sighted despite their teasing, undulating, rollercoaster topography. They were well surfaced. They had really great rhythm. And they were quieter than expected. Google tells me England's population density is 434 people per square kilometre. That figure is 141 in Northern Ireland and 77 in the Republic (both are lower than that of Wales, too). So whoever it was in the Mazda press office that made the call to head west instead of to Spain or Sicily, well played.

> **"These are meant to be the most heavenly roads in all Ireland"**

Last month I was glad to be back in Ireland, this time bound for the south-west, in a personal capacity – a prenuptial rendezvous in delightful Dingle, home of Fungie the dolphin who lost his pod and an implausibly large number of drinking establishments. Most of the guys turned to Michael O'Leary to get them to Limerick and ended up hiring Hyundai Tucsons from there. With the new BMW M4 CS in for its road test that week, and in on-brand green, fate was a bit kinder to me. I collected a friend who lives in Pembrokeshire and we took the ferry to Rosslare.

We made for Killarney the day before the official itinerary commenced. This gave us time to explore the Ring of Kerry and experience for ourselves what are supposed to be some of the most heavenly roads in all Ireland – and, we therefore surmised, the world. Needing to get to Dingle by lunchtime, we chose our route carefully. Naturally 542bhp and an effective four-wheel drive system wouldn't hurt, but going full Paddy Hopkirk wasn't really why we were there.

After waking everyone at our B&B with that unmistakably nasal, impatient M-car cold-start idle, the following morning we left Killarney and traced the N71 south-west through the Middle Earth landscape between Muckross Lake and Looscaunagh Lough (if nothing else, you have fun wrapping your tongue around the names). The M4 CS moves well for a big beast but, really, this is Caterham Seven country. Then it was the rugged, rallying mecca that is Moll's Gap (named after the landlady who ran an unlicensed pub when the road was being built in the 1820s) and onto the R568 before we joined the flowing N70 as it meets the coastline before Caherdaniel. Here the BMW was much more at home and poised through third-gear sweepers, but the real star was the breathtaking backdrop where Ireland meets the Atlantic. It's a rival for the Hebrides.

Instead of completing the northern coast of the Ring, we cut inland at Waterville (if you need breakfast, hit the Beachcove Café) and wove our way up the Ballaghisheen Pass before heading north-west and onto the Dingle peninsula.

Dingle itself sits on the south side of this spit of land, and the N86 is pleasant enough and will get you there pretty quickly. Far better, though, to head to Stradbally and tackle what was once the most famous rally stage in Ireland, the Conor Pass, although it hasn't been used for competition since the 2004 Circuit of Kerry Rally. It's the high point of our little tour, literally and figuratively. This wild corner of Ireland really does deliver.

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Welcome to this year's coverage of the Autocar Awards, a 44-page celebration of the best cars and the sharpest minds blazing a trail for an industry that refuses to slow down

Song has been Kia CEO for five years; previous roles include head of Kia Europe

“Customer focus was the number one philosophy for supporting our total change”

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ISSIGONIS TROPHY

Ho Sung Song

Kia’s CEO has led a transformation of company culture, brand identity and model strategy – and Kia is achieving enviable success as a result. **MARK TISSHAW** meets him in Seoul

Kia wasn’t broken when Ho Sung Song took over as president and CEO in 2020, but he has still managed to fix it.

He has transformed Kia’s product range, introducing many segment-best electric cars that have added incremental volume; overhauled and modernised the company’s brand image and logo; entered new segments with the likes of pick-up trucks and, imminently, vans; and all while setting sales record after sales record and boosting profitability and revenues.

Pound for pound, there is perhaps no other car industry executive with his golden touch and ability to keep so many plates spinning successfully. He is the most worthy of winners of the Issigonis Trophy at the 2025 Autocar Awards, an accolade named after the inventor of the Mini, Sir Alec Issigonis, and presented to the industry’s highest personal achiever each year.

Song is generous with his time when we meet at his office on a warm, late-May day in Seoul, high up in a modern skyscraper overlooking the sprawling city. The interview initially ends after almost an hour, but Song insists the tape recorder goes back on to share more of Kia’s story with you and we get nearly another hour with him before he stops to have his portrait taken.

There are lots of achievements to pore over, as well as the need to get to know a humble man who doesn’t have the profile of some of his CEO peers. But first: just why did he change so much when, from the outside, Kia’s 21st-century performance was already one of the industry’s biggest success stories?

“We had to prepare ourselves for the paradigm shift of electrification,” he says. “I felt a small change would not transform our mindset into this new era, and maybe we could not then survive in the future.”

Song says the big change at Kia was in fact the result of lots of smaller changes all deployed at the same time, such as the redesigned logo and new model strategy, and it came after he encouraged his management team to “share their visions and join the movement”.

Collective buy-in is always key for Song. He has his own ideas, of course, but he makes sure they are presented and agreed collectively before they are enacted rather than simply because he is the boss. You get better buy-in that way, he believes.

Indeed, a laser focus on people has led to a fundamental shift in the corporate culture, what Song calls a “kind of code of conduct” that everyone at the company now abides by.

After a year-long project looking in great detail at the company and how it operates, Song reset what it means to work for Kia and ensured every decision is made with the customer in mind, so that the company became what he calls “customer-centric” in its operation.

While it’s easy to dismiss the term as corporate jargon, it’s clear from our time in Korea with Song and other senior Kia executives – including global operations boss Ted Lee, design boss Karim Habib and vehicle development chief Manfred Harrer – that all of Kia’s work and operations are governed by the principle behind this phrase, which often comes up unprompted.

“This was the number one philosophy for supporting our total transformation,” emphasises Song.

Customer focus was one of three Song mantras: the second was a desire to become truly environmentally friendly, not just through zero tailpipe emissions from electric cars but in manufacturing and vehicle development too. ▸

HOW KIA’S SALES HAVE INCREASED BY REGION IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Central and South America	+117%
North America	+47%
Europe	+31%
Asia-Pacific	+43%
India	+74%

The best example of this is Kia's introduction into the van sector. The project is called PBV (Platform Beyond Vehicle) and is at its core a scalable EV skateboard architecture. The first model from this project will be launched soon as a Ford Transit Connect rival called the PV5.

Song says Kia's electric vans will take advantage of all the benefits of electric power and packaging in a way that rivals don't, because its competitors are all conversions from combustion-powered vans, but the most intriguing aspect about the project is actually the manufacture of the vans.

Typically, vans are built on a line and then sent off to modifiers, where new, unwanted parts are ripped out and not used. But Kia will do the conversions itself in the factory by pulling vans off the production line into 'cells' to receive choice modifications. It has built a new facility south-west of Seoul at its Hwaseong plant in which to make the PV5s. The larger PV7 and PV9 models will come from a second plant, in 2027 and 2029 respectively.

"The usual modification process is very high-cost and is not an environmental process because they're taking out the interior," says Song, for whom the PBV project is a very personal one, having had his interest piqued by the business potential of light commercial vehicles while leading Kia in Europe in the 2010s.

"The PV5 has a totally different manufacturing process and is very environmentally friendly. The way they will be made will be a game-changer for light commercial vehicles… We will have a big voice in Europe with the PV5," he says.

The third mantra for Song was the need to stay profitable throughout the transition to EVs, taking "consistent but steady steps" and staying flexible amid the rise and fall in demand for different fuel types. In short, not all of Song's eggs are in an EV basket and the company is able to produce and distribute vehicles around the world according to real demand. He says: "We want to remain flexible to be able to move to the trends of the market."

When Song starts work at 7am with a coffee, he begins by "looking in detail at all the numbers, in all countries and regions, model by model, as this gives me a lot of understanding of the market".

It's this deep market knowledge that allows Kia to stick rigidly to its 'pull' strategy, where models are sold according to true demand, rather than 'pushed' to market at discounted rates due to oversupply to the detriment of residual values. Song works closely with Lee on this and inventory is moved around the world from Kia's 14 global factories to capitalise on market trends or local incentive schemes.

Kia's UK sales in 2019

97,323

Kia's UK sales in 2024

112,252

LAUNCHING INTO NEW SECTORS

Kia Tasman pick-up truck

Kia PV5 electric van

Kia EV9 Range Rover rival

New electric van range has big potential, says Song, starting with PV5

There have been numerous product successes during Song's tenure, perhaps none more so than the Telluride SUV in North America, a non-electric model that has propelled Kia's growth in the market.

The Telluride was intended to sell around 50,000 units per year, but Lee tells of how Song was so confident of its success due to his research into the market that he asked for a supply chain to be created to support 100,000 units. In 2024, almost 115,000 Tellurides were sold in the US alone.

"He said he had the feeling and confidence that the car will be a big success," says Lee, who points out that others in the company thought it might do closer to 40,000 units. "It's now the strongest Kia in the US and the most significant brand-builder. He's very good 'on the future'."

Big numbers have followed Song around in his tenure as Kia CEO. In the past five years, he has overseen at least double-digit sales growth in most major regions: 47% in North America, 117% in Central and South America, 31% in Europe, 55% in the Middle East and Africa, 43% in Asia-Pacific and 74% in India. Even in China, where most foreign brands are

Song's fast-acting ethos boosted Tasman's potential in Australia

Song (far right) says: "The design process is very valuable for me"

"The way the PV5 van will be made will be a game-changer"

struggling, Kia is turning a profit, its operation pivoting to exporting models produced there to emerging markets.

As the industry suffered global shock after global shock during that five-year timeframe, Song increased sales every year and profitability too. Kia's operating profit margin was an enviable 11.8% in 2024. For comparison, the Volkswagen brand's was just 2.9%.

This consistent and sustained growth has only been possible because of the company's cultural shift, says Song. While there are short-term ways of turning around a business and making its balance sheet look healthy, that will last only a year or two "without a change in mindset".

He adds: "In the past, maybe our decisions were more focused on company benefits, or company profits. Today, when we're making decisions, I'm saying to our divisions not to ask me and to instead think of the customers. It is a clear direction and all the people here now share that."

Perhaps the biggest visual difference for Kia came in 2021 when it unveiled its new logo and branding, and ditched 'Motors' from the end of its name to be known simply as Kia. The logo had been quietly tested at motor shows and was well received for making the brand feel more modern and progressive.

The design of Kia's cars has changed greatly over the past five years too. Peter Schreyer was key to bringing Kia up to a good mainstream standard over the previous two decades, but Habib has pushed that further under the 'Opposites United' design theme to the point where Kia is seen as a design leader.

Song highlights design as one of if not the most significant factor in buyers choosing Kias and he takes the keenest of interest in a monthly design review with the wider design team. Here, final designs for production cars are chosen from a few potential options and Song tries to play the role of dealers and customers in ensuring mass-market appeal while "respecting Karim's visionary dreams".

He adds: "The design process is very valuable for me. We are always creating and developing good designs, for better products in the future."

Just as significant as the new look for the company and its cars, says Song, was the fresh dealer branding that arrived as part of Kia's new look and feel. Rather than dealers feeling a reluctant obligation to have to invest in a showroom overhaul, "they wanted the change as soon as possible", says Song.

"In the past, we would push them to change the look, but this was a different situation," he adds. "Our dealers could feel the customer attitude and approach is different, and there would be different traffic in the showroom. This new identity is very important to attracting customers, on top of the reliability and credibility of the vehicles. In my opinion, it's a very, very successful story in helping our brand in the market."

The new look was a key part of an extensive update to Kia's 'Plan S' strategy, which was started under Song's predecessor, Han Woo Park. Plan S outlined how Kia would go electric and Song's initial revisions included 11 EVs by 2026 and those first electric vans based on a new ▸

Song believes the EV van sector is about to take off

“I am a positive man and try to motivate people in a positive way”

◂ electric architecture. All while boosting sales, revenues and profits.

Such statements and star-shooting plans are common in the industry, yet Song’s plan, which has evolved into a more pragmatic one across multiple fuel types and markets, has delivered.

The electric cars launched under Song are also among the industry’s best. The EV6 was named Car of the Year in 2022, the first time a Korean brand had won the award. The EV9 and EV3 have both subsequently made the shortlist too.

The EV4 will arrive next as a true Tesla Model 3 rival as a saloon and as a Europe-friendly (and Europe-built) hatch. The EV5 is effectively an electric Sportage and due this year, while smaller and more affordable EVs – the EV2 and an entry EV – will appear over the next few years.

Unlike major rivals, Kia has balanced the launch of electric cars with developing its ‘legacy’ models too, the two lines running in parallel and given equal billing. The obvious example is the Sportage, which has been the catalyst for Kia’s growth and success in Europe since production of it began at the company’s Slovakian factory in 2010. The Sportage is a mainstay towards the top of the UK’s best-selling cars chart and was a driving force behind Kia breaking through the 100,000 UK sales barrier for the first time in 2022.

More broadly, Song says the company’s UK business is a great example of the “customer-centric operation” he has built and it is now heading towards 120,000 sales as the third-largest brand in the UK. It has done all this while complying with the government’s targets around EV sales and not ‘pushing’ cars to the market.

Song’s commitment to affordable, entry-level city cars, through not only the continued sale of the Picanto but also the development of it, is admirable too.

And returning to vans, in addition to the innovative manufacture of Kia’s PBVs, Song believes the electric van market is about to explode because governments worldwide “can push and drive big companies” into changing their fleets to more environmentally friendly options faster and more meaningfully than

E3 KUK
E6 KUK

2022
Kia EV6 named Car of the Year

Kia in 2024

3.1
million sales

11.8%
operating margin

Revenues up
7.7%
on 2023

2030 sales target

4.2
million vehicles (1.3m EVs)

private buyers to cars. Time will tell if his golden touch can be applied here.

Song, who has worked his way up the Kia ladder, credits his stint as Europe CEO for giving him the best preparation for the overall CEO role, because the demands and functions across many countries were so varied.

He describes his own style as a collaborative one but he knows, as the boss, the final decision rests with him. He says he's a fast decision maker and gives a one-week deadline for decisions to be made, which is suitably speedy for such a large industrial company. Any slower and Kia is "losing opportunity as the market is very live".

Song spends around half his time in Korea, fitting in a round of golf when possible as his main hobby, and the other half travelling. He makes sure he "listens to all the voices" to further build global market insight, particularly those of dealers because "they are the real voice as our business partners and for our customers". Song will also watch Kia videos on YouTube to get even more opinions.

While many of his automotive industry CEO peers have effectively performed fire-fighting roles in dealing with various crises over the past five years – including Covid, subsequent chip shortages and ongoing geopolitical tensions – Song has adopted the opposite mindset.

"I'm a very positive man and I always try to motivate people in a positive way," he says. "Of course, there are negatives, but if we study well, we can prepare for negative things. That positive thinking gives me a better result.

"We have to find the opportunity to grow further in difficult times as it is the same for everybody. If we manage well, we have a better opportunity. Here, there is very strong teamwork so I believe we can provide better results in difficult times."

While clearly proud of his achievements to date and reflective for this interview, Song is one for relentlessly looking forward.

Unprompted, after being asked whether the modernity of Seoul is reflected in today's Kias, Song's answer tangents into an admission that, in a desire to improve his cars, he thinks of a customer who might not be happy with theirs and uses that as motivation to make Kias better.

"Sometimes I think to myself we may have one or two customers that are not happy with our vehicles," he says. "If I think of that, I am always working harder to improve our quality and our product." And that's why "we have to improve" still in every area, "daily".

Song's not done fixing things yet. **A**

WHAT KIA EXECS SAY ABOUT SONG

"He's obviously my boss…" says Kia design boss Karim Habib with a smile when asked what life is like working with CEO Ho Sung Song. "But I'll try and be as genuine as I can."

What follows is real warmth in Habib's words about Song and he says the way they work together and Song's interest and trust in design is "incredibly helpful and incredibly rewarding at the same time".

He says: "There is no formal process that says 'design must be at table and sign this off'." Instead, Song works with "a matter of trust and a matter of interest" in seeking the opinion of Habib and his team.

"That allows us to propose things with a risk, but that's important to what we do as designers," says Habib. "There are many people in his position who would not allow that. Without that, I couldn't do half of what we're able to do."

After a period of rapid development, Kia's designs are now among the most bold and exciting in the industry but there is an argument that the dynamics of the cars have been left in a steadier era.

That's not lost on new vehicle development boss Manfred Harrer, who confirmed that he is working "very, very intensively" with Song to "bring more driving pleasure" to Kias. "We can do more to bring more 'fun to drive' to the cars," says Harrer.

Ted Lee is another of Song's management team and is in charge of the international business. He has worked closely alongside Song for more than a decade and is a key architect of the 'pull' strategy, which ensures every Kia around the world is sold according to actual demand to help preserve residual values and truly build the brand.

Lee says Song simply gets stuff done and cites the new Tasman truck as an example of that. A dinner with Kia's team in Australia highlighted gaps in the Tasman's accessories armoury that would be crucial to its success to the Antipodes. Song called the R&D team to report the problem and they had started working on a solution by the next morning.

There are also unusually "no fixed rules or patterns for high-level reports or approvals". Instead, Kia operates with what Lee calls a "fast, efficient and effective" structure where anyone can have an idea and see it quickly followed through.

"Even a first-year freshman can interact directly with the CEO," says Lee – something we see for ourselves when shooting his portraits. Song's office is on a floor that's accessible to all because it doubles as a staff rest area with a tuck shop, where employees can find themselves queuing for a can of Coke with the boss of the company.

Design boss Habib values Song's trust in his team

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STURMEY AWARD

Peter Rawlinson

Lucid's co-founder was in on the ground floor of the EV era, and he's still driven by a passion to innovate. STEVE CROPLEY meets him

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

Peter Rawlinson, winner of Autocar's 2025 Sturmey Award for innovation, is one of a small, distinguished crop of British engineers who have honed their skills working in challenging automotive careers at home, then risen to stellar status by taking charge of globally significant projects in other countries.

Although the serious car electrification era is barely two decades old, Rawlinson is already well established as one of its principal players. He was the inspiration – 'chief engineer' sounds too staid – for first the Tesla Model S and then the Lucid Air, arguably the two most influential EVs of the past 20 years.

The Tesla, launched in 2012, is the first electric car to have achieved genuine global sales success. It did this by basing its appeal on progressive design and practical capability, and, most important of all, pioneering the use of energy-dense lithium ion batteries.

The Lucid Air is the Model S's spiritual successor a dozen years on, offering new forms of EV efficiency that cut dramatically its dependence on fat, heavy and expensive batteries. The Air is the first of a planned range of Lucid models, the most significant of which is scheduled to be a Volkswagen Golf-sized design, two years away, that will combine affordability with long range.

Rawlinson says he recently signed off the major elements of this potential winner but won't now be leading from the front; he was recently replaced as CEO but continues to advise the creative teams he built.

Rawlinson was brought up in South Wales, where he demonstrated his engineering skills early on by designing his own toys, which his handyman father made at home. He describes himself as "a country bumpkin", but nevertheless he headed fearlessly into central London and Imperial College for his education in engineering. He says this experience, plus the arrival of a 1938 Ford 8 inherited from a departed uncle, decided the course of his life: he admits to an intense interest in cars "from which I have never looked back".

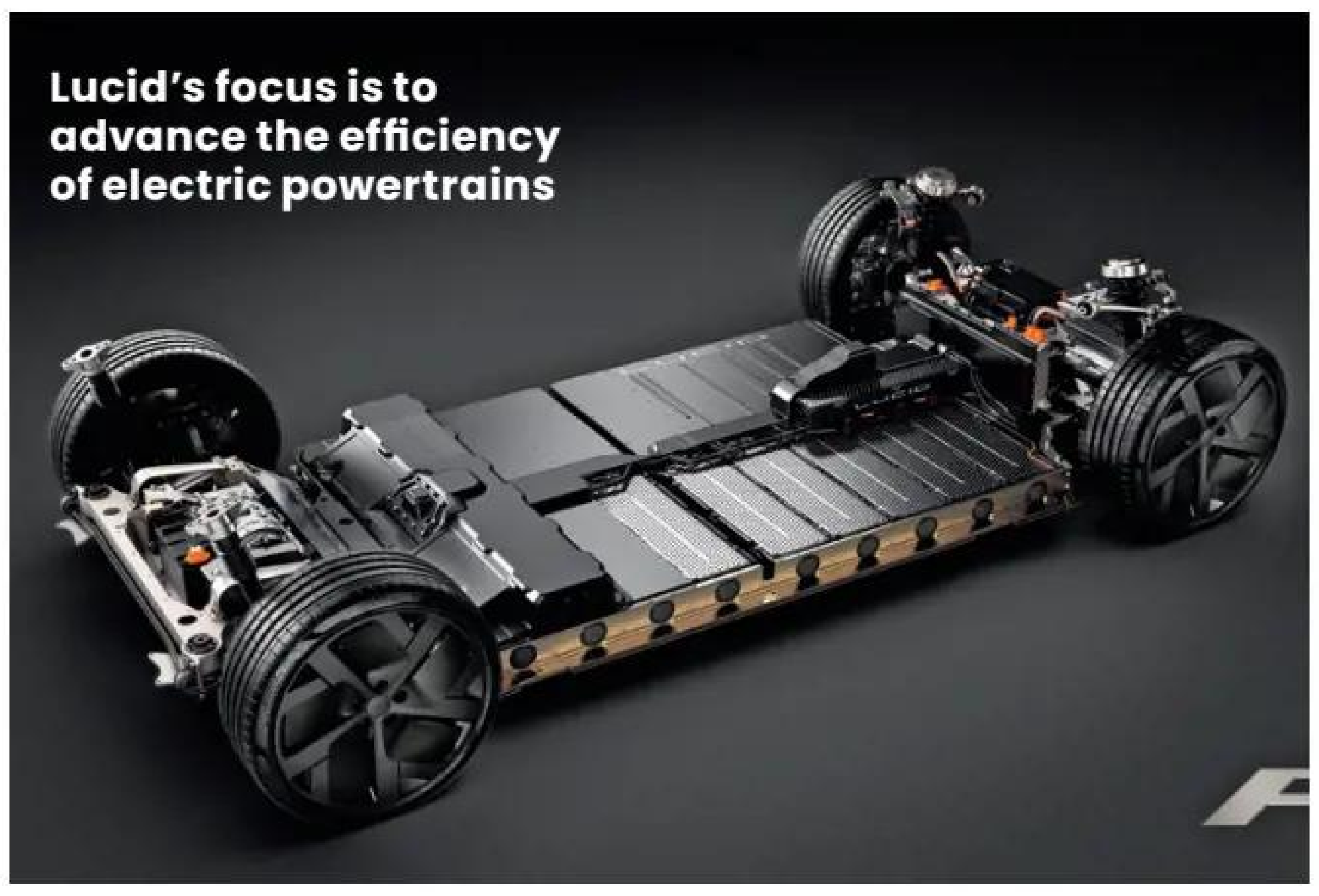
At Jaguar in his early thirties, Rawlinson took responsibility for advanced body design and crashworthiness, working on the XJ41 and XJ42 coupé and convertible projects and acquiring a helpful grounding in digital engineering. Impetuously, he left Jaguar to start his own kit car company, making Imola cars that didn't sell but which had the virtue of using folded stainless steel for a monocoque chassis design that both influenced the Lotus Elise's extruded aluminium chassis and encouraged Hethel to offer its inventor a job working alongside Lotus greats such as John Miles and Roger Becker.

A Lotus Engineering consultancy job sent Rawlinson to California where he "got to know people" while working on an aluminium spaceframe for J Mays, soon to be boss of Ford Design. Along the way he also designed the Th!nk electric city car for Norwegian clients, using the battery compartment to provide

Lucid Air saloon is set to be followed by a VW Golf-sized model

Rawlinson was involved with the Tesla Model S from very early on

“I co-founded Lucid to advance the art of EVs. Using smaller batteries is crucial to that”



Lucid’s focus is to advance the efficiency of electric powertrains

Tesla Model Y-rivalling Gravity SUV should really put Lucid on the map

extra chassis rigidity in a way that would later stand him in good stead. A friend, Adrian van Hooydonk, now BMW’s design chief, put Rawlinson in contact with Elon Musk, then a billionaire rocketry enthusiast with a passion to build electric cars. Franz von Holzhausen, an American who had worked for Mazda and GM, was already working on the Model S’s long-nosed shape, which was to prove less than perfect for the first Tesla. Still, it looked great.

Rawlinson credits Musk with inspiring him to make EVs. “At the time, even scientists said the energy density of batteries was so poor, nothing could be done,” he says. “But Elon said we were going to use lithium ion batteries, the kind they put in laptops. This promised cars that could do 200 miles with 70kWh of batteries, weighing 300kg. It was a game-changer. We’d spotted the fact that EVs were viable, and no one knew!

“This was my chance. Elon wanted to rethink everything. I knew I was the right guy to do that, so I grabbed it with both hands.” The Model S, as we all now know, became a hit. Nearly 300,000 units have been built since June 2012, from a two million Tesla total, and production continues.

Even so, Rawlinson admits that the baked-in faults of the Tesla Model S made room for his second game-changer, the Lucid Air, currently made in California by a company he co-founded after a falling-out with Musk.

Rawlinson says one Model S drawback is that it was styled before its mechanical layout was designed; a second foible is that insufficient original thinking was applied to its powertrain. For the Lucid Air, a more efficient motor was integrated with the rest of the powertrain, which has been a significant boost.

The clue for the future, insists Rawlinson, is reducing battery cost and size while delivering the top-end range and performance that is a Lucid speciality. “I co-founded Lucid not just to make EVs but to advance the art of electric cars,” he says. “Using smaller batteries is absolutely crucial to that.

“Some people believe the real task is to make batteries cheaper, but even if you achieve that, the weight and size won’t change and you’ll probably have less output. The real task is to make cars go farther with less battery – by saving weight, improving aerodynamics and cutting frontal area, by cooling batteries better and making motors more efficient. We’re doing all of it. That’s the vision of Lucid.” A

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EDITORS' AWARD

Diane Miller

Stellantis's director of the parts distribution centre at Ellesmere Port could never be accused of painting herself into a corner. **STEVE CROPLEY** asks what drives her

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

Diane Miller, Stellantis's top UK car manufacturing executive and winner of Autocar's 2025 Editors' Award, has loved cars all her adult life – preferably in very large numbers – and can vividly remember the day the obsession began.

From a post-graduate job at Ford's then mighty Fiesta plant in Dagenham, Essex, Miller has spent the past 30-odd years mastering ever more responsible automotive jobs around the world – for Ford, Aston Martin, GM and most recently Stellantis, in the UK, Europe and the US.

Miller is decisive but modest and as a result reluctant to identify any particular secret of success. But if you converse with her long enough, she will eventually admit to one asset: "Finding a way to get on with people." It is for this that she is known and loved by the people who have worked for her. Having discovered its effectiveness early on, she has deployed her liking for people in every car job she has had, and she has become famous for it.

Miller's most spectacular achievement to date has been the 18-month conversion of the former Vauxhall Astra plant at Ellesmere Port, near Liverpool, to the manufacture of battery-powered delivery vans for five Stellantis marques: Vauxhall, Opel, Citroën, Peugeot and Fiat. It has been a vital move in rescuing volume vehicle manufacturing in this country.

Now that this EV factory conversion has been achieved, Miller is turning her hand to running Stellantis's massive new national parts distribution centre, located just down the road from the van plant at Ellesmere, where the company is spending £500 million to expand and improve the way it delivers components to its customers in the UK and Ireland.

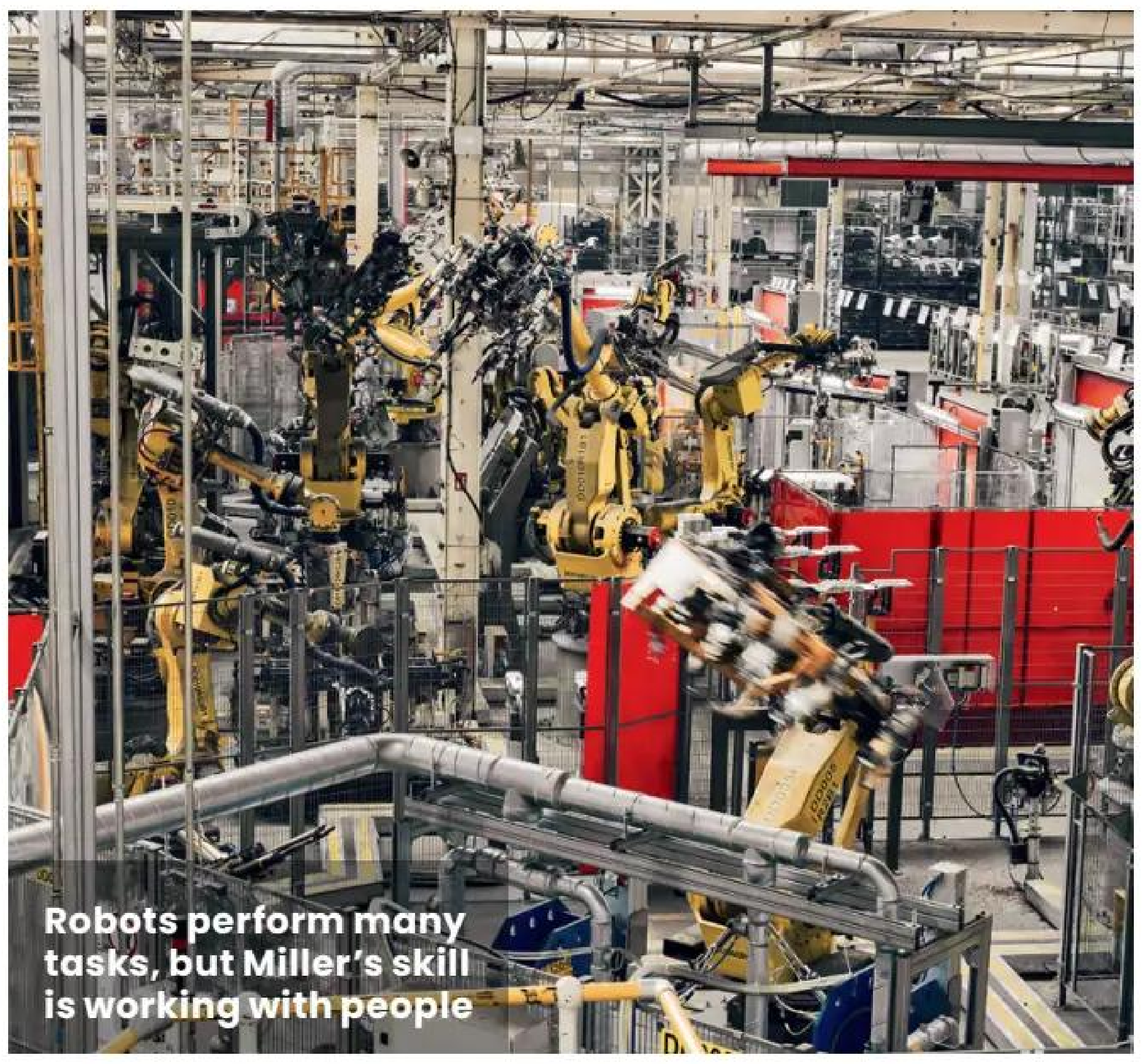
The parts centre project has required another wholesale reorganisation, entailing both the redeployment of car-making people and the importation of new workers into a business that, despite its size and scale, has to be very labour-intensive. It is a perfect place for a unique character like Miller, a highly experienced engineer who discovered early how to get on with people.

"I went to an all-girls convent grammar school in Northern Ireland," she explains, "and three of us opted for A-level physics. Our teacher loved engineering, and the upshot was all three of us chose engineering at university: mechanical and production engineering for me; civil and aeronautical for the others.

"My degree was from Liverpool John Moores University, and as part of a 'jobs milk-round' for graduates I was invited to Ford's Dagenham plant to see how it was run. I was instantly amazed and intrigued that they could build 60 cars an hour, and the experience had a lasting effect on me. Even after more than 30 years in the business, I still find it amazing."

Miller joined Ford, moved to Dagenham and stayed five years. She achieved rapid promotions, first to senior process engineer and then to a manager's job in the paint engineering area, launching new technology in Ford plants across Europe. Paint doesn't suit everyone, but Miller earned an early reputation for being willing to try anything and work anywhere. "Crossing the Irish Sea to go to university was the big move," she says. "After that, anything was okay."

Pretty soon Miller was heading to Chicago on a two-year paint unit training scheme that extended to four. "It was a situation that occurs in many companies," she says. "You go on a training scheme and the money runs out, so they get you to do the job anyway. It was great training because no one else knew about paint, so I had to make the decisions. It worked out okay."


Robots perform many tasks, but Miller's skill is working with people

Miller's career progressed more rapidly than most young engineers her age, but she's careful not to give herself much credit. "I had very good mentors," she says. "And there were so few women in the industry in those days that people probably noticed you more. Mind you, even today I'm very sad that there aren't more women in these engineering jobs. There are great careers here for those who want to try it."

Women can succeed in a male-dominated arena like car-making just by being who they are, says Miller. They tend to humanise the place, she says: "Right from the start, I'd go to a factory, talk to the operators and ask how their job should be done. It was a bit different from some managers who arrive and think, well, 'I've got the degree, so I know how things should be run'. But people on the floor can work smart better than anyone, and if they trust you, they'll tell you how."

When the Chicago gig ended, Ford wanted Miller to go back into central engineering at Dagenham, but she wanted to stay in a plant and felt that would have been a waste of her paint know-how. So she worked happily for several years at the Ford Transit plant in Southampton, leaving before it closed in 2013 because its manager was heading for Aston Martin (then a Ford company) and asked her to join him, bringing her paint expertise. It made sense, because her husband, an American, was already a paint supplier there.

Aston Martin paint is quite different from Ford Transit paint, she found: "I started off thinking five jobs an hour would be easier than 60 jobs an hour, but that was completely wrong. True, Aston paint was very different – many more coats and lots of polishing – but the big difference was the fact that the operators had so much to remember." The Transit takt (process) time was around five minutes, explains Miller, whereas at Aston it was more like 25 minutes. People had to remember 25 minutes' work rather than five, which is clearly much more difficult. Still, Miller thrived there for six years – until Ford ▸

“I’d ask the operators how their job should be done. People on the floor can work smart better than anyone”

"If you think clearly, you can do anything"

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Ellesmere Port is now a key hub for Stellantis's electric van production

◂ sold Aston Martin and suggested, once again, that she return to central engineering.

Just in time a GM headhunter arrived with an offer to move to Ellesmere Port where Vauxhall was about to launch the Astra D2, but there were big problems with the paint shop. Miller, uniquely qualified to take hold of the process and fix it, was perfect for the job. Aston was small by comparison, and Miller liked the Liverpool area where she had been at university.

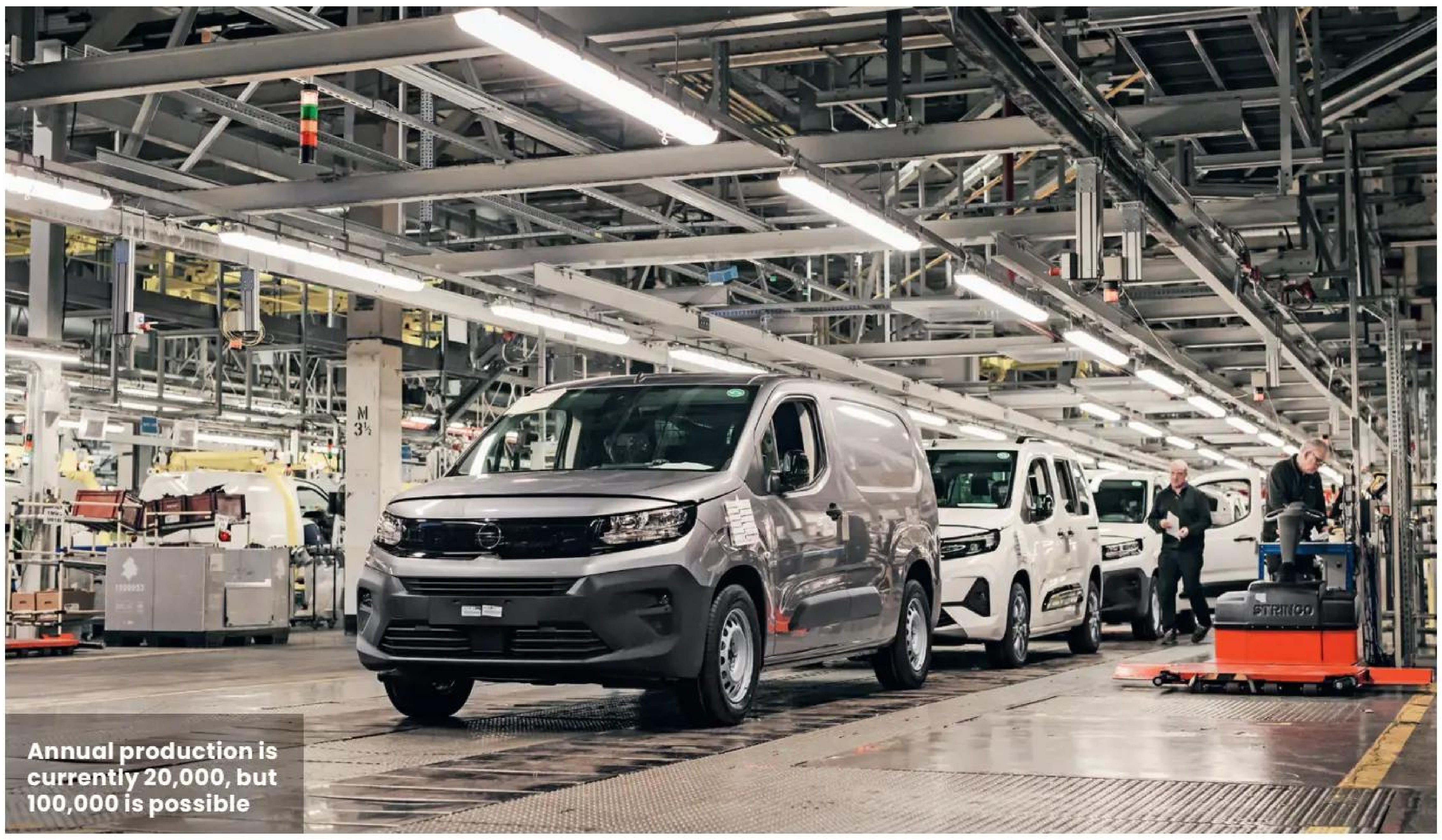
"We decided to make the move, and I joined the company at a high enough level to make the changes needed," she says. "Our Astra launch was the best in the company's history, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. From that I was asked to take over general assembly, another progression. I had enjoyed paint, but there are many more people in general assembly, and I guess that's where my skills are. We made some good progress; people felt able to tell me about their difficulties. They knew if there was a problem and I could fix it, I'd do it right away."

Astra production ended in April 2022 – with quality levels higher than they had ever been. Then came the bombshell decision to start making Stellantis electric vans.

"It was a funny time," says Miller. "The whole of Europe thought this plant would never reopen, but we already knew [then Stellantis boss] Mr Tavares had decided to keep it going because he'd discovered – from the first time he visited us – that there was an ethos among Ellesmere people that we'd find a way to do whatever was needed to keep the place open.

In order to make the changes, the factory was shut for 18 months. Staff who couldn't make cars helped move robots and build new rest areas. Managers went to Madrid, where changes planned for Ellesmere had already been made, to see exactly what was needed. Everyone adapted, in no small part because Miller's can-do culture had spread throughout the place. By September 2023 electric vans were flowing down the lines.

The success isn't complete. For Miller and Stellantis, the current 20,000-unit annual output isn't nearly enough, mostly because they believe the government's re-adoption of 2035 as an ICE cut-off date has hurt demand for Ellesmere's all-EV output. As a stopgap, they have begun building bodies for an ICE van plant in Algeria (boosting output to 50,000 units), and production will soon be further augmented by the arrival of a range of larger, Vivaro-sized electric vans for the five Stellantis marques. Ultimately demand will be much higher – perhaps as high as the plant's 100,000-a-year, seven-day, three-shift capacity. Ellesmere Port is ready.



Annual production is currently 20,000, but 100,000 is possible

Miller, meanwhile, is several months into her demanding new project – and she will be happy with more after that. She has spent most of her three-plus decades in automotive providing a great role model for other people, not just women, but she says the lessons she has learned have been important in her own personal development, too.

"I'll never forget how those early days at Dagenham flipped my mind," she says. "They taught me that if you think clearly, you can do anything. I started applying those principles to my own life and found that there's nearly always a way you can make things happen. This industry has been a great teacher."

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE, BY TOMORROW

Diane Miller's new domain, the Stellantis UK parts distribution centre at Ellesmere Port, where the group is spending £50 million to confirm the site as its UK commercial vehicles hub, has £500m-worth of stock on its shelves. It can cater for all Stellantis marques, including recently arrived Fiat, and reckons on sending out £1.5m-worth of components every day, most reaching customers the following day.

Miller admits this is an all-new business to her, one in which they speak "a completely different language". She sees her role being to help improve the efficiency of the place, but she was pleased to discover recently that the UK operation has a measurably better relationship with its customers than most, and it will soon be used as a good-practice benchmark for others in Europe.

The Ellesmere distribution centre is very dependent on its human resources: cataloguing is digital, but the actual parts-picking is done by experienced human hands – still the best for this scale of operation.

Typically, Miller has already been mixing it with the front-line operators, both the experienced ones and recent arrivals, and listening carefully to their ideas for improvements. "A lot of them know me from manufacturing," she says. "They know we can improve things together. They also tell me not to worry about the new job. It's hard at the beginning, they all say, but you'll get the hang of it."

Ellesmere Port parts centre is under Miller's remit

The facility's inventory is worth £500 million

Miller oversaw production and the staff who are key to it

“You can feel the soul you give to a car when you test drive it”

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MUNDY AWARD FOR ENGINEERING

Philippe Krief

The French engineer, now Renault's CTO, is the man behind some of the 21st-century's great performance cars. **RICHARD LANE** meets him

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

It turns out there's an 11-week lead on a half-hour audience with Philippe Krief. Surprised? Don't be. In September last year, the man from Marseille became the Renault Group's new chief technology officer. This would be a substantial professional endeavour even if the 60-year-old hadn't, only the summer before, also left Ferrari and taken on the role of Alpine CEO. Somehow he does the two jobs side by side, each day scoped to the minute. It's hardcore. Mr R&D for vast Dacia, even more vast Renault and 'vehicle as a service' provider Mobilize is also on the hook for the resurgence of a brand some believe can, in the EV era, wield a degree of clout similar to that which Porsche amassed in the petrol age.

So Krief is busy – but if you manage to pin him down he makes for fascinating, steely company. It was obvious from the nervous energy of the comms staffers, with whom we were awaiting their CTO's arrival in a grand exhibition space (replete with giant turntables) in the bowels of Renault's Technocentre, that he comes with an aura. Not the full Tobias Moers – people weren't profoundly intimidated, as was often the case when the ex-Aston Martin CEO was inbound – but a deep seriousness. Brows were furrowed, chatter was clipped, chairs were arranged and rearranged. Then he was among us, in a black turtleneck more car designer than camber-geometry tragic, five minutes early.

So who is Philippe Krief, winner of this year's Mundy Award for Engineering? A born engineer, for one thing. With high-flying execs the car bug is so often inherited, but neither of his folks worked in the industry, instead running a removals business. A successful one, admittedly – young Krief was rolling around in the back of DS Citroëns and had a soft spot for his father's Peugeot 504 coupé (the Pininfarina one, he reminds me), so delectable metal was on the scene. But it wasn't the impetus. Engineering was the job he always wanted to do, "so I combined cars with my passion", he says. Engineering was the desire, cars the vessel.

The balance has since shifted, and Krief today can't imagine engineering anything else. He says: "The thing I learned, and that I now know would be difficult not to have, is the soul you give to a car," he says. "You can feel it when you test drive it." I guess you can't get quite the same kick from designing an MRI machine, or even an unmanned rocket.

That soundbite is typical Krief talk. He speaks softly, authoritatively, in accented English, enunciating precisely as he describes engineering concepts and management structures, but then often expressing a sentiment that would sound twee coming from anyone else. It helps that 'soul' is very much his oeuvre, as anyone who has tried his back catalogue knows.

You get the sense Krief is a unique proposition. On one hand the man is obsessed with quantitative approaches – "at the end of the day, what makes the car feel [special], even if it looks subjective, can be measured" – and he champions simulators, with their potential to do all the dogsbody bits of chassis development, driving down costs and freeing up talent. But he also firmly believes the human touch is non-negotiable if you're going to create a sports car that is "completely harmonious in everything". ▸

Family's 504 coupé helped shape Krief's love of cars

KRIEF ON HIS CARS

458 Speciale is a Krief favourite and one of the sweetest driver's cars

Quiz Krief about the projects of which he's the most proud and he'll name two, starting with the Alfa Giulia Quadrifoglio, the secretive development of which he describes as "a human story". It was like "a pure skunkworks" car, he says of the V6 super-saloon, which vividly showed us what the Giorgio platform could do. His other shout is for the Ferrari 458 Speciale, albeit with the recent 296 GTB shoehorned into the nomination, presumably because they have similar DNA. "The 296 is maybe the only car where, if I had to restart, I wouldn't know what to do to make it better," he says. From a dynamic perspective neither would we, Philippe – the car is a masterpiece and a total joy.

But what of the product he wishes he had worked on? "[Porsche] 911, certainly," is the immediate response. This is interesting to say the least. Krief is adamant he could never work for a German company because of the way the engineering efforts are organised, with lots of specialisation but nobody holding the holistic view. "I've met a lot of engineers from Germany," he adds. "They were very, very precise in their field, but every time we had to do a meeting on chassis I'd have to talk with 10 or 15 different guys, and there was nobody with the global vision." We can also assume that he wouldn't leave the 911 unchanged. He notes that the steering is "too loaded but at high speed becomes very light". Anything else? Well, since you asked…

"I would also change the smoothness of the behaviour of the car during throttle-on in a corner," he says. "The car is quite push-understeer and then after, huge oversteer! The suspension also needs to 'work' in order to give you smoothness and predictability; German cars are very controlled, but zero roll is not [good], so we would work on the suspension and steering." He adds that the brakes bite too abruptly, so he would look at the feel at the pedal. Sounds to me suspiciously like a rear-engined Maserati MC20…

As for personal wheels, Krief owns an Alpine A110 and an Alfa 4C, as well as a Giulia GTA sprayed a bespoke Ferrari grey by the Zanasi carrozzeria where extra-exclusive cars such as the Daytona SP3 are finished. It's no garage queen, though, with 260,000km on the clock – and counting.

Centre stage: Krief (left) speaks engagingly despite his rigidly timetabled schedule

Hardcore but fluid Giulia GTAm was a riot and in some ways a baby Ferrari

A Krief-developed 911 could have been quite a special thing

New A390 electric SUV kick-starts Alpine's assault on Porsche

◂ In many ways he is perfectly suited to taking a romantic brand like Alpine forward into what is, technologically, still rather an unknown space.

The extent of Krief's uniqueness as a world-class chassis developer surely stems from his geographically varied and demanding career path. Part of the final year of an engineering degree was spent at Renault, developing early suspension simulation models. It was pioneering stuff in the '80s – and perhaps useful preparation for today's uncertain world. Next was Michelin, when tyre development was still a "trial and error process". He talks fondly of his then boss, who inspired him by "pushing some concepts that, in the company, he alone believed in", but he had the data and the will to prove it to the doubters further up the corporate food chain. Then came a move to Japan, to help the French tyre maker win lucrative OEM contracts. There, Krief's own delight in detail and fact was "enhanced by a factor of 1000" by the Japanese engineers. "They were so *precise*," he says, "so willing to understand, so deep in the analysis."

One imagines the subsequent move to Italy, to head up chassis development for transverse Fiat platforms – everything from 147 GTA to Ducato – was something of a culture shock, although it undeniably gave Krief huge engineering breadth.

Then Maranello. The low-speed back-axle jounce resistance of Fiat Doblos was swapped for the limit-handling characteristics of mid-engined supercars. Even today, Krief is best known for stitching together the dynamic canvas

“I needed to be sure I agreed with the philosophy. I’m too old to change”

on which the 458 Speciale – one of the all-time great, exploitable supercars – imparts total joy on the driver. And yet perhaps his real magnum opus was what came next: Alfa Romeo’s Giorgio platform was a storied project completed largely in secret, and the resulting Giulia was an anti-BMW 3 Series, as the Alpine A110 is an anti-Porsche Cayman. Same mechanical brief but with a wonderfully fresh, lively approach.

“We were asked to do the platform and first car in less than three years,” says Krief, “without any components from the Fiat world, and without any engineering [input] coming from Fiat, so we had to create a small team.”

The beauty of the small team, as Krief puts it, is that no single person designs just the suspension bushes or the drop links and so on. “There are guys who think about the [entire] system,” he says. It’s an important way of working for Krief; it’s quite similar to the British school, and it’s something he not only sees and encourages in Alpine but which he is now inculcating on a deeper level across the entire Renault Group portfolio.

“I needed to be sure that I agreed with the philosophy,” he says of his then potential switch from Ferrari to Alpine in 2023, after 25 years working in Italy that culminated in signing off the plug-in hybrid Ferrari 296 GTB. “Now I’m too old to change, so when I was first contacted by Alpine, I thought about the challenge: to start from scratch, to develop a product in the electric [sphere] that will have the same attributes as the cars I have always developed and loved.”

It was a compelling offer, and it drew the Frenchman home for, possibly, the last big job.

Now the vision is coalescing. The A390 is here with its dual-motor rear axle and clever chassis electronics; prototypes feel promising. Next year the existing A110 (not a Krief product, although it feels spookily like one) will retire. Its loss-leading replacement is due in 2027 and will introduce the Alpine Performance Platform, which will also underpin a roadster and a revived A310 2+2. A V6-engined supercar is also incoming. The goal in all cases will be to quantify attributes that made the cars on Krief’s CV so lovable then replicate them for EVs. A hard job, but not impossible.

He says: “With a different architecture [to the petrol cars], with different weight and inertia, with higher-density motors, shorter response time, the [engineering method] will be different but the result will be the same: pleasure.”

Renault’s 5 Turbo 3E is as mad – and as retro – as they come

Then there is the broader Renault Group picture. That means everything from the evocative, limited-run, £135,000 Renault 5 Turbo 3E to the Pokémon-like Dacia Spring. As Alpine CEO, Krief slots into a leadership phalanx alongside Dacia’s energetic, eccentric CEO Denis Le Vot and Renault’s stoic strategic boss Fabrice Cambolive. But as group CTO he is deeply involved in all three brands at a pivotal moment.

Dacia’s disrupting ability to trim production costs, Renault’s skill at inspiring with charismatic EV throwbacks and Alpine’s dedication to the driver provide quite the playground for an innovator – especially for one who both recognises the need to be seen on the shop floor and has the macro goals of “gaining speed in development” and instilling a group-wide “spirit of innovation”. Again, that might sound twee, but Krief is just stating his reality.

Krief is a risk-taker and quite dogmatic in some ways, but it works because he’s also a calculating, rigorous individual with an instinctive feel for how an entry-level supermini needs to drive and for what makes a driver’s car sing. Could a new A110, developed on his watch, really do for EVs what the Ur-911 did for sports cars, all those decades ago? It’s a tall order, but it just might.

“There is no certainty, especially when you’re targeting excellence,” he says towards the end of our time together. “We want to offer the first real electric sports car, not [just] a performance car but a real electric sports car. A car that gives you real driving pleasure and a sense of harmony.”

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MOTORSPORT AWARD

McLaren Formula 1

The Woking-based Formula 1 team has hit a rich vein of form that recaptures its past glories. **JAMES ATTWOOD** drops by

The McLaren Technology Centre still looks futuristic enough to double for a spaceport on Coruscant, so it's staggering to reflect on the fact that it's now 21 years old. Even more staggering given its age is that a constructors' championship-winning McLaren had never been built there – until last year.

When Lando Norris crossed the line to win the 2024 season-closing Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, McLaren ended a 26-year constructors' championship drought – the longest in the history of the sport. The team came close a few times and clinched the 2008 drivers' title with Lewis Hamilton, but there had also been some humiliating lows: in 2017 the Woking squad finished ninth out of 10 teams.

McLaren's dogged climb back up the ranks and return to title-winning glory is why we have named the team the winner of our Motorsport Award. It would be easy to distil success in Formula 1 down to building a fast car, sticking a powerful engine in it (a Mercedes, in this case) and having two quick drivers – and in Norris and Oscar Piastri, McLaren might have F1's strongest line-up. But there's more to it than that. McLaren's rise has been built on the efforts of the 1000 or so staff working incredibly hard in the McLaren Technology Centre.

That effort has been led by Piers Thynne, the 17-year McLaren veteran whose role as chief operating officer means he essentially runs the factory. He describes last year's Abu Dhabi race as "the culmination of an incredibly focused period of work for the whole team". McLaren started 2024 trailing Red Bull on pace, but an upgrade package in Miami changed the pecking order, he says: "As a team we worked across all functions – aero, technical and operations – and dug deep to deliver a large upgrade for Miami. That was a pivotal moment in the season."

McLaren COO Piers Thynne orchestrates the smooth running of the Woking effort

Thynne describes his role as being "an enabler", supporting all areas of the team to be the best that they can be. The role has also included a lot of work helping McLaren Racing boss Zak Brown and F1 team principal Andrea Stella to change the culture.

"The culture of the team has gone from good to extremely positive in the past 18 to 24 months," reveals Thynne, "and that has come from Zak and Andrea's approach. They empower me to drive that each and every day. We don't need a hierarchy; we just need good people working together and having good conversations to ensure we are all pushing to deliver performance."

In sport, winning often cures everything, and the mood in the team has lifted as McLaren has started to win regularly. Thynne says success helps "drive the team forward", but he adds that it's important everyone understands they can't rest on their laurels. "F1 is an extremely complex sport and things can go wrong," he says. "When

Lando Norris and team celebrate after winning last year's Miami GP

Leading the way in 2025: Oscar Piastri wins this year's Bahrain Grand Prix

McLaren's Technology Centre is now 21 years old but doesn't show its age

> **"We avoid positive or negative hype and focus on what we need to do"**

you're celebrating success you still have to push reliability, push performance and push every opportunity to score points.

"You have to be humble, but ultimately working in F1 is a privilege because you're at the pinnacle of motorsport. You can never expect an outcome: an outcome is the result of the work you've put in. We ask everybody to avoid positive or negative hype and focus on what we need to do as a factory, which is to give Lando and Oscar the best equipment each and every race."

McLaren's last constructors' title in 1998 came in a different era of F1, with near-unlimited spending. Teams now have a cost cap (this year it's £104 million), so much of Thynne's effort is expended working out how McLaren can "extract every amount of performance per pound".

He adds: "It's a really exciting challenge. It means the brainpower you put in is a competitive differentiator against others; you have to look at all angles of how you spend your money and where your focus should be."

As an example, he has to decide between spending money building a stock of spare parts in case of accidents against developing upgrades, and how much effort to put towards development of the car for 2026, when F1 will undergo a significant regulatory change with new chassis and powertrain rules. "We relish the challenge of regulation changes, because it gives the opportunity for the sport to reset," he says.

A reset isn't always good news for F1's top team: after Hamilton's 2008 drivers' title, a major regulation change for 2009 left McLaren struggling to compete at the sharp end. But trying to maintain its position at the head of the pack is a good problem for McLaren to face – one it hasn't had to deal with for 26 years. ▲

EMBRACING A RACING LEGACY

McLaren COO Piers Thynne also oversees the team's heritage fleet, which this year has moved back into the Technology Centre. That means McLaren's historic racers are now rebuilt and repaired just metres from the workshop in which the current MCL39 is prepped.

"Our legacy is extremely important to us, and it's a privilege to carry the baton in our 63rd year as a race team," says Thynne. The fleet spans McLaren's history, but Thynne has a clear favourite: the M23, which was used for five seasons from 1973 until 1977 and in the hands of Emerson Fittipaldi secured the team's first drivers' and constructors' titles. Last year Thynne discovered the previously long-lost chassis 15 in the archive, and he oversaw a project for a group of apprentices to rebuild it into pristine order.

M23 competed for five seasons, here at 1977 Brit GP with Gilles Villeneuve

JOHN BRADSHAW / GETTY IMAGES

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DESIGN HERO

François Leboine

Fiat's head of design has more than made his mark on contemporary motoring. **JAMES ATTWOOD** finds out what inspires him

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN BRADSHAW

It's vanishingly rare that a new car is so well received it actually shifts perceptions of the company that created it even before anyone has sat behind the wheel. That's the sort of instant impact of which car designers dream but precious few will ever achieve. Yet two of François Leboine's recent creations have done just that, for two different firms. Which is why he's a worthy winner of our Design Hero award.

In his current role as Fiat's design chief, the Frenchman led the creation of the new Grande Panda hybrid, which combined knowing nods to the 1980s Panda with a fresh design infused with intricate details. It created new possibilities for a firm overdependent on the 500, while proving affordable cars could still be stunningly stylish.

"I knew we had to make a new icon," says Leboine. "Fiat is a great brand, but when I arrived four years ago, too much depended on the 500; that was clear for everyone, but it's not easy to tackle. There was a question about whether all the projects should be related to the 500 [in terms of design], because that was our hero car. My answer was that we needed to create a second hero. Of course, that's not easy to do."

We will return to the Grande Panda, but Leboine's story predates his arrival at Fiat's Centro Stile in Turin. The bulk of his automotive career so far has been spent at Renault. As the French firm's concept car design boss, he was tasked with creating a fresh version of a classic model. But after two years of work, the project stalled in 2020 because "nobody was interested".

Until, that is, new Renault Group CEO Luca de Meo walked into the design studio on his first day on the job, looked at Leboine's vision of an electric Renault 5 and said 'let's make that'. "That was a great moment," reflects Leboine. "That is the power of the CEO, to take a project like that further. I spent six months with Luca on that project, and he was really close and involved."

It was Leboine's concept that de Meo unveiled when he launched his transformation plan for Renault in 2021, and although Leboine left for Fiat before the production version was finished, it retains all of his design cues.

He admits it's strange seeing the car he helped design now on the road, particularly so close in timing to the Grande Panda. "Usually you're in the company so you see it coming," he says of the 5. "But here there was a shift of time, and it's coming from somewhere else.

"But I always saw it with the eyes of the Grande Panda arriving, because I knew what we had to beat. It was good to know we could compete – not choosing the same weapon, but with a different object. The most important thing when I arrived here at Fiat was to bring something affordable, that is smart in the way we built it and which was even more accessible, which is difficult for an electric car."

What unites the 5 and the Grande Panda beyond their shared retro-modern aesthetic and relatively small size is how friendly and upbeat they are. "That's very important for me," says Leboine, "to bring an image of a positive future, and to bring this future with a smile."

While the Grande Panda is clearly inspired by the original 1980 Panda, it isn't a new version of the city car (Leboine's team is working on that) but a larger model intended to help Fiat launch a second line of Panda-inspired cars alongside those based on the 500.

"We had to work out how to make this car become another icon," he continues. "The best way was to use our story and make something that has a past but is projecting ourselves towards the future." ▸

“The best way was to make something that has a past but is projecting towards the future”

Leboine's bold Grande Panda has proved to be a defining new model for Fiat

The Grande Panda sits on Stellantis's cost-controlled Smart Car platform (also used by the likes of the Citroën C3 and Vauxhall Grandland), which gave Leboine a strong starting point. He explains: "We had to place this product in a new area of the market to be complementary to the [existing] Panda, but also so it could work as a potential global vehicle."

Leboine insists the connection between the original Panda and the new model isn't really in its styling but in "designing something practical", adding: "It had to be the Fiat side, the Italian side, so not too pragmatic. If it was too pragmatic and functional it would almost become German, which is cool in itself, but we have to be Italian. It has to be functional, but with a layer on it that makes you smile."

Perhaps the neatest design detail on the Grande Panda is the stamped bodywork, with 'Fiat' pressed into the bootlid and 'Panda' spelled out down the sides. That is some achievement for a budget car, and Leboine admits "it was a big fight", although he notes that "everything" was a fight: "We had to push for the lowest cost possible, but we had to defend what we thought was necessary to make this a Grande Panda."

Given that it has no function beyond style, the stamped bodywork was, admits Leboine, "hard to justify", but he says "it was so much part of the original car's philosophy we felt it made the personality of the vehicle". But even with management approval, the factory was initially unable to do the process to the right level of quality. The solution is hidden in plain sight: the design for the Panda lettering was chosen because it could be stamped into the car at the required quality, and it was then turned into the font used for the logo.

"The stamped font is a real industrial design story, which is so Panda in its approach," says Leboine. "The duty of Fiat is to bring a solution that everybody can afford. That's why, as an industrial designer, I wanted to come here. It fits my way of seeing things."

Leboine didn't start out as an industrial designer. Growing up in Normandy, he first studied fine art and then applied design, before specialising in industrial design at university. That led him to Paris-based design agency MDB, where he spent three years working on projects including Korean TGV trains and trams. "Everything was about trams," he smiles. "At that time, every city in Europe wanted a tram."

But with his passion for car design still "frustrated", Leboine left to study at the Royal College of Art in London (see box, right), where he was eventually sponsored by Renault, subsequently leading to a job.

He worked first on the Mk2 Mégane, eventually heading up the design for the model's third generation. "It was my first experience in a product design company," says Leboine. "They took me as an artist and taught me what engineering is and how to make things work."

During his time at Renault, Leboine led the exterior design studio during the development of the Clio, Captur and Dacia Sandero, before switching to the advanced design studio to work on the likes of the 5 and Renault Morphoz.

After 20 or so years at Renault, Leboine said he didn't aim to leave for Fiat – "I plan the future of the car industry, but I don't really plan my future," he jokes. But when the opportunity arose "it was too interesting to be put to the side", so once his wife and children had enthusiastically agreed, he made the leap.

As with most designers, Leboine credits the team he works with – and he insists his Autocar Award is as much recognition for them as it is for him. He says: "We have created a team with a lot of energy. We are limited in number and

Leboine (left) has found a comfortable new home at Fiat

Playing on retro heritage matters, but not at all costs

Leboine conceived new 5 but saw its birth from afar

RCA ALUMNUS'S OWN DESIGN HERO

François Leboine completed a two-year master's course in transport design at London's Royal College of Art in the late 1990s, where contemporaries included Nissan's European design chief Matthew Weaver, our 2023 Design Hero.

Once again, Autocar spotted future talent early: Leboine took part in a challenge set by Colin Goodwin to develop a new British sports car. Leboine's effort (above) featured multiple surfaces and materials, playing on his industrial design past and showing influences from outside the car world.

In fact, Leboine says the key benefit to attending the RCA wasn't strictly his course but being in a school where all the arts were represented. "I was enriched by the diversity," he adds.

Perhaps that's why Leboine's own design hero predates the car. "The guy who invented all of this is Leonardo da Vinci, with his approach of touching everything from art to engineering," he says. "He was the god of design because he was not limited to one thing. He was interested in everything. That's the approach every designer should have."

"I'm not saying I'm at his level," adds Leboine. "Not yet…"

> *"If you don't know the past, these retro products still have to work"*

resources, but they have had the courage to do things they've never done before. I had a clear idea of what I wanted, and they did it fast and with professionalism."

There's more to come, too: the Grande Panda was first shown as one of five Panda-based concepts, all of which will go into production in the coming years. There's also a new Panda itself, along with new versions of the stalwart 500 and other vehicles in its family.

Leboine says there will be "a retro flair" on future products, but he adds: "If you don't know the past, these products still have to work. We play with pop culture and car culture, and our designs have to work with a new generation that maybe don't have the codes – they won't see a retro thing from the past. You can look at a Grande Panda and just see a cool car from today."

The Grande Panda has barely hit the showrooms, yet it has already put Fiat in a place it hasn't occupied for years. "We have opened possibilities, and we changed the image of the brand with one car," says Leboine. "Suddenly Fiat is not only the 500; Fiat is fresh. We have really come back to what Fiat should be." ▲

> **Leboine helped create the Twizy during his time in Renault's Barcelona studio. "We started from nothing," he says. "It was a dream because there was a big hole between cars and motorbikes, and we tried to fill it with passion."**

Leboine was involved with the Renault Twizy from the beginning

> **“Stroll never expected to own an F1 team, let alone a great heritage car brand”**

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OUTSTANDING LEADER

Lawrence Stroll

The Aston Martin boss is steering the brand back towards profitability – and this, he tells STEVE CROPLEY, is only the beginning

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

Even before you meet Lawrence Stroll, there's a foolproof way of forming a strong impression of his success and prowess at leadership. Just take a walk along the wide central corridor of his brand-new, £200 million Formula 1 team headquarters, built on the site of the old Jordan and Force India factories at Silverstone. It will teach you much of what you need to know in a short time – especially if your guide, like ours, is an Aston Martin insider who has worked in other F1 teams and knows the differences.

Aston Martin Aramco F1 is now "by a mile" the best-equipped team in the sport, your guide will tell you with pride, and the winning ambition of its Big Boss and his near 1000 employees fully matches the fabulous facilities. This place is filled with the anticipation of success, part of which comes from the fact that Stroll is the only remaining "old-style" F1 team owner, involved every day in leading a winning business. The Frank Williams and Ron Dennis characters are gone: apart from Stroll, today's F1 team owners are OEMs and investment funds.

Building this F1 team would have been a mammoth achievement if Stroll and Aston Martin had taken 20 years to create it, but the opportunity arrived "very unexpected and unplanned" about six years ago, says Stroll, when we settle in his corner office, sumptuous but simple, to hear the story.

There had been lots of time before the meeting to wonder what it – and he – would be like. This Canadian billionaire, who cites fashion as his business and cars as his passion, has a reputation even among business equals for being a tough character who wastes little time getting to the point. Photographs usually show a poker player's features, unsmiling, hard to read and absolutely no pushover. Today has apparently turned into a busier day than Stroll expected: will urgent business pressures make our talk too much of a pain in the backside? It has happened before.

Stroll turns out to be affable and candid, even if our time with him is to be strictly limited. He reacts graciously to our congratulations on his well-earned Outstanding Leader award. Decisive leaders, he agrees, are vital if you're to build success.

He admits he never expected to own an F1 team, let alone one of the world's great heritage car brands, but Stroll has strong motoring connections. He has a huge Ferrari collection and was the Canadian Ferrari importer for 20 years. He had a decent career as a gentleman race driver, and for a while he owned a Canadian race circuit. Back when Peter Collins and Peter Wright were running Team Lotus, his Tommy Hilfiger fashion brand sponsored them. And he often attended F1 races with his late friend Mansour Ojjeh, the majority shareholder in McLaren during Dennis's time.

The opportunity to buy an F1 team arrived with a bang when Force India's Vijay Mallya was forced out of business: Stroll bought the team out of administration in August 2018 for £90 million, assuming another £15m in debt and changing the name to Racing Point.

"I always admired F1," says Stroll. "I could see that this was a global sport with three times the eyeballs of, say, NFL in North America. Today, an NFL team is worth $10 billion, and it seemed to me that with a much bigger global audience, an F1 team should have an even bigger price tag."

The big contradiction, he says, was F1's lack of a budget cap, which essentially divided teams into "the guys at the top and the others". Top ▸

◂ teams' costs were met by the marketing budgets of cigarette brands, car makers or fizzy drink manufacturers. If you wanted to run an F1 team as a profit-earning business, reckoned Stroll, you had no chance under the old system. But the arrival of Liberty Media as F1's owner changed things. The budget cap they introduced set out to level the playing field.

"The budget cap is nowhere near perfect," says Stroll, "but at least there is some sort of limit. Here was this team, 31 years old since Eddie Jordan started it, now called Force India. I saw the sport going in the right direction and thought that with my vision, my passion – and my money – one day we might make it great."

All of which has led to today's Aston Martin Aramco F1 set-up, an organisation Stroll acknowledges as being far from complete. Part of the build-up has been the celebrated hiring of Adrian Newey, widely acknowledged as the world's greatest race car designer, to work on a car for next year's technology changes.

Reviewing Stroll's Aston Martin, it's tempting to look for comparisons with the business of Enzo Ferrari, who famously claimed that his road car concern existed only to finance his racing. But Stroll negates that idea, stressing that pure business logic was his original reason for getting into F1. The name came later.

"This team was all-British and had been at Silverstone for 31 years," he says. "I wanted the greatest name for it, and that was Aston Martin. At the time [Aston Martin's] owner, an Italian private equity firm, was sponsoring Red Bull. I went to them and said I could offer much more than just being a sticker on a Red Bull. But they had a public flotation planned and didn't want to change anything. So I bought my [F1] team in July, they did their IPO in October. But I stayed in the loop, and about a year later we started talking…"

In 2020 an investment group led by Stroll took a 16.7% interest in Aston Martin. He sees it as a career high. "Look," he says passionately, "I'm a brand guy. I know how much it costs and how long it takes to build a brand. Aston Martin is an iconic British institution. To own it is the biggest dream in the world, a fantasy. Sadly, the company had got into financial difficulties and needed a big injection of cash, but for a dream like this I was prepared to do it."

Stroll took control as executive chairman one week before the Covid lockdowns began. But he had owned Aston Martins before and now saw twin opportunities: to improve the road cars – "buyers respected them but never thought they were the fastest or had the latest technology" – and to rebrand his Racing Point F1 team as Aston Martin. "This sport has 2.3 billion watchers a year," he says. "What better platform could there be for marketing a road car company globally?"

Although our conversation so far has mainly been about F1, Stroll makes it crystal clear that the road car side of the business is as important to him as the racing: it's one reason why he took such trouble to attract talented former Bentley and JLR boss Adrian Hallmark to the Aston fold. Hallmark is renowned as one of the best strategic thinkers in the car business – which is just what you need to help engineer a dramatic turnaround.

Stroll claims, and Autocar's testers agree, that Aston Martin's production models have improved greatly in recent years. The DBX SUV is a success, and Aston is entering the mid-engined plug-in hybrid segment for the first time later

Stroll rebranded his Racing Point F1 team once he had taken control of Aston Martin

"F1 has 2.3 billion watchers. What better platform could there be for marketing a road car company?"

Aston Martin Valhalla had its public debut at the recent Monaco GP

this year with the Valhalla. Under Stroll, the company is focused on delivering sustainable growth that is profitable and scalable. Yet the share price still wanes, despite recent cash injections and support from Stroll and other strategic investors. It all begs the killer question: how confident is Stroll that the business of making road-going Aston Martins can be viable?

Stroll relaxes as he answers. "I've never been as confident of anything in my life," he says. "I wouldn't keep putting money into something I didn't believe in. You wouldn't be sitting here in a place I've just spent £200 million to create. I believe Aston Martin has a phenomenal future."

Stroll acknowledges there are problems. Buying the company just before Covid certainly didn't help, and even before that there were massive supply-chain issues. Aston experienced production delays for the DB12 and difficulties integrating a new platform for its new infotainment system. But the product portfolio, insists Stroll, has never been better in the history of Aston Martin – and this is only the beginning.

What about profits, the measure of success in Stroll's own book? "As we've stated," he says, "in the second half of this year we'll be cash-flow positive. That means next year will be cash-flow positive; when I took over the company, we were burning £300 million a year. The second half of this year is a critical turnaround point for us. I said it would take the first five years of our 10-year plan, and that's what is happening. Now it's all about growth."

Such is Stroll's infectious passion I feel we could talk all day, but I am conscious of his busy schedule so ask just one more question: would Stroll regard rebuilding Aston Martin as his life's work?

Every other car boss on the planet would hide from that one. Even as I ask, I'm not expecting a straight answer, even from this straight talker. But Stroll steps right up. "Yes, it is," he says. "I'll be 66 in July and I'll do this another 10 years, maybe 15. I gotta work. Not for financial reasons, but just mentally."

And what will success look like? "Here's my thinking," says Stroll. "Ferrari has a business making 14,000 cars a year. They have an F1 team to market it and they're worth about £90 billion. We will continue to deliver disciplined volume growth and improved profitability towards that of Ferrari, and we have an F1 team to market our cars. Can you imagine what the potential value might be? I'll leave you to speculate." A

Vanquish V12 represents the latest breed of much-improved Aston Martins

Stroll lured Adrian Newey away from Red Bull to design Aston's F1 car

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INNOVATION AWARD

Protean Electric

Britain's in-wheel-motor pioneer is on the cusp of greatness. **FELIX PAGE** finds out why

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

B=D=O
CA21 LVH

Whitehead poses with IWM-equipped E-Class and Bedeo range-extender van conversion

Surrey-based EV motor developer Protean has its roots in a firm called PML Flightlink, which made headlines in 2006 when it fitted four in-wheel motors (IWMs) to a Mini Cooper to give 640bhp, a sub-5.0sec 0-62mph time and a £200k price. The outfit was later acquired by NEVS, the Chinese-owned successor to Saab, before EV tech specialist Bedeo took it over in 2019 and began using its innovative IWMs as part of a range-extender conversion package for diesel vans.

Today, Protean – winner of this year's Innovation Award – has around 120 staff spread across four global facilities: the UK engineering centre in Farnham, a factory in Tianjin, China, a supply chain office in Shanghai and a new production site in Istanbul. Last year, Protean built 1500 motors, around a third of which went to parent company Bedeo for use in the RE-100 van. But CEO Andrew Whitehead says it could make 10,000 units as things stand, before scaling up to 20,000 and then, 18-24 months later, 100,000.

Unlike many an ambitious tech start-up, though, Protean's growth plans are not founded entirely on enthusiastic optimism and unbridled self-belief but rather a demonstrable appetite from key industry players to embrace disruptive new technologies and explore different ways of designing and engineering vehicles. Whitehead says the company is already in discussions with a number of "major, well-established, global OEMs", and he estimates the worldwide market for IWMs could be worth more than £15 billion by the middle of the next decade.

It's moving fast, too: the first production car to use the technology is Renault's crazy new 5 Turbo 3E hyper-hatch, due on the road as soon as 2027. Whitehead won't say whether or not it's Protean's motors behind those mammoth monoblock wheels, but he does hail the 3E as an exciting showcase of what can be achieved with IWMs. "It's a great example of a car that couldn't otherwise be done, and it's using in-wheel motors to break some barriers in terms of electric vehicles," he says. "So we commend Renault on their sage decision."

The tangible real-world benefits of Protean's motors include more immediate power delivery, more intricate apportioning of torque between the wheels (try 3690lb ft in a scarcely believable five milliseconds…), improved noise isolation and even the possibility to turn the driven wheels at up to 90deg. But Whitehead says the potential of this technology goes far beyond enhanced drivability, and that can only be realised when vehicle architectures are actually being designed from the off around IWMs, rather than adapted to accommodate them.

"We believe that in-wheel motors will make better electric vehicles," he says. "There are three elements of that: they will be lighter and more aerodynamically efficient, which means they will cost less because for a given range you will need less energy – and if you're consuming less electricity, you need to charge it less often."

The third element is the most important, he says: "They will be better for consumers because they will have more space inside them."

By relocating all the traction components to the corners of the chassis, Protean's powertrain solution allows for a flat and featureless floorpan that provides the springboard for a radical rethink of the conventions of vehicle design.

Whitehead explains: "The end goal is to re-architecture the vehicle using in-wheel motors. We've shown that you can deliver one segment's worth, and in some cases two segments, of additional space inside the same footprint. The best way to think about it is this: Volkswagen Golf footprint, Mercedes E-Class interior space."

That uplift in cabin space has big implications for refinement and practicality, but Whitehead also notes that "the Golf is cheaper to make than the E-Class", so big cars needn't command such an overt premium in the IWM era.

So, then, to the obvious question: if this technology is such a vastly superior solution to conventional electric motors, why isn't everyone already developing and using them? "Well, the automotive industry is still the automotive industry," explains Whitehead. "The biggest thing is technical risk: when a car company commits to put a technology into production, they are committing to – I use broad

IWMs increase unsprung weight but do so within an acceptable window

"Think Volkswagen Golf footprint with Mercedes E-Class interior space"

numbers – three years of development time, a minimum of seven years of sales and then a legal obligation to 15 years of servicing afterwards. Add all those up and they have to be confident that throughout those 25 years (a) the technology is going to work, and (b) they're going to be around to support it."

It's a culture of conservatism that has fostered technical ubiquity, but in today's era of fearsome competition and ceaseless advancement, the time to experiment has come. "The requirement to differentiate is much stronger now than even three or four years ago," says Whitehead. "But the biggest challenge, of course, is cost. Anybody in the manufacturing side of automotive that's not talking about costs is not in the industry."

Whitehead acknowledges that there is currently an inherent cost penalty that comes with swapping from one motor to two on each axle, but he says "that is our final barrier". Protean's current-generation IWM have undergone a rigorous and lengthy development programme to ensure that their enhanced capability doesn't come at the expense of real-world dependability.

Solve the cost equation, says Whitehead, and Protean is on track to be at the epicentre of an all-out upheaval for the electric vehicle. "If the in-wheel motor market expands, as I believe that it can, it will be a giant market," he says. "It will be over $20 billion in the middle of the next decade, and if we have 10-20% of that market, we will be a very successful business."

IN-WHEEL MOTORS vs BRITISH ROADS

If you were ignorant of the revolutionary nature of Protean's E-Class-based prototype, you'd be happily convinced it was a run-of-the-mill, mainstream electric family car: it is swift off the mark and quiet at a cruise, and it brings itself almost to a halt with no brake pedal input.

What's really remarkable is just how little fuss it makes while doing so, riding with a composure that's comparable to anything fronted up by the German exec purveyors in 2025. The logical assumption would be that so dramatically increasing the unsprung weight at each corner would have a negative impact on refinement, but as Whitehead explains, that's not an unavoidable truth.

Chassis engineers work within an operating window of sprung-to-unsprung mass ratio: a 1500kg car, says Whitehead, might have 250kg of unsprung mass, resulting in a ratio of 6:1, while a heavier luxury SUV with massive wheels and brakes might be nudging up towards 8:1.

"As long as we can deliver an increased unsprung mass that stays within that operating window, generally we're okay," says Whitehead. "And if you look at electric vehicles or plug-in hybrids, the vehicle is tending to get a bit heavier, and that gives us more room to play with."

Protean's prototype E-Class rides quietly and comfortably

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FIVE-STAR CAR

Porsche 911 S/T

To suggest there was an inevitability to Porsche's 911 S/T scoring full marks in its Autocar road test is to underplay how hard and rare it is for any car to be awarded all five stars. But sometimes you need to accept the realities of the situation. Here, reporting for scrutiny, was basically a three-pedal 992-gen 911 GT3, only made a fair bit lighter and with an unapologetically road-optimised set-up. On paper this was the modern-day 911 for which many of us would exchange a kidney.

That said, certain reservations persisted. Borrowing body panels and other bits of hardware from the GT3 RS and costing £231,600 before options (the sticker price of our test car was £255,092), the S/T is hardly a 911 for the people. There was also a concern that, even if Porsche had crafted a super-911 that could double up as a big-mileage touring accomplice and a razor-sharp B-road maestro, a tidal wave of road roar might undermine the whole show. Finally, there was the fact that five-star cars normally change the game to some degree: as wonderful as the S/T is, it never threatened to do that. Its significance is a bit more subtle.

Let's briefly remind ourselves what a 911 S/T is. A kerb weight of just 1380kg (1408kg as tested, although that is still, impressively, lighter than the far smaller 997-generation GT3 RS we weighed in 2010) makes it the daintiest 992-generation 911 to date. That can be chalked up to a number of elements: the single-mass flywheel and lightweight clutch; the removal of the GT3's rear-axle steering; the use of CFRP for the front wings, the GT3 RS-spec doors and some of the structural underbody bracing; and of course the short-ratio manual gearbox.

At the centre of the show is the 518bhp, 9000rpm, naturally aspirated 4.0-litre flat-six engine that by this point needs little introduction. It's every bit as special as a contemporary Ferrari V12 but even more piercing at its limits and with keener throttle response. Even though Porsche has had to fit particulate filters to the exhaust tract, this is still perhaps the most memorable-sounding motor in series-production today. And then there is the suspension, which was the most unusual thing about the S/T. Never before had Porsche's GT division built a 911 solely for the road, and the pivotal part of the equation therefore would be the suspension set-up.

Driving the S/T in anger on a good road is up there with the most gratifying things a human can do on four wheels. However, as we discovered, it takes a moment to get fully synchronised with this car. On one hand the S/T is pure attack: the engine revs so ridiculously freely and the nose moves very keenly through those first few degrees of a direction change.

On the other hand it is quite laid back: the default damper mode allows so much body movement compared with that of the 911 GT3 that we wondered whether Porsche had

The 911 S/T mates GT division know-how with road-going accessibility

LÖSEN / REMOVE
ANZIEHEN / TIGHTEN
CENTERLOCK

“Focus is needed, but once you’ve got your bearings there’s nothing like it”

Once on its wavelength, the 911 S/T is fluid and engaging like no other 911

overcooked the settings. There is also the manual gearchange, which opens the door to human operational inconsistencies (seriously – a perfectly rev-matched downshift in an S/T requires practice). If you’re doing it properly, the process of gelling with an S/T should also reveal that on a trailing throttle this is the single-most-adjustable 911 of this era. And while that is often the hallmark of a properly entertaining driver’s car, you can have too much of a good thing.

Focus is needed, then, and perhaps an open mind, but once you’ve got your bearings there’s nothing else like a 911 S/T. As you dial into the unique relationship between steering response, the grip of the front axle and the suspension’s roll rates, you realise you’re driving an automotive polymath. Flowing but drumskin-tight; composed but mischievous; supercar-special but easy to rub along with; cutting-edge but old-world. It’s an unbelievably pure and expressive car from a handling perspective. And, boy oh boy, there’s that powertrain to explore, plus those fabulous, 911-typical driver ergonomics to revel in. The S/T will go down as one of the all-time great 911s because it isn’t just a paint-by-numbers attempt to fill yet another hardcore 911 niche. It has a definite identity – and it is one that sparkles.

And the telemetry? At Horiba MIRA the S/T was a tenth quicker than a Carrera GT for flat-out dash from 30-70mph. For what its maker likes to insist isn’t a ‘numbers’ car, that’s not bad going, eh? **RL**

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FIVE-STAR CAR

Skoda Superb

It suggests unusual faith in nominative determinism to call your product the Superb. Indeed, for most of the history of Skoda's large saloon and estate car, the Surprisingly Decent would perhaps have been more apt.

The Superb is now into its fourth generation, and you might say that faith has paid off because it is now good enough to earn the full five stars in the Autocar road test.

Of course, real credit goes to Skoda's design philosophy and its engineering team, which has taken a much more prominent role within the wider Volkswagen Group in recent years.

Instead of just taking existing VW Group parts and adapting them for use in its cars, as Skoda has done – with notable success – for many years, Skoda engineers actually led the development for the Superb and its VW Passat sibling, allowing them to create a car that's more inherently 'Skoda' than ever before.

This latest incarnation has all the classic Superb hallmarks. Its new look is fresh and modern, yet it remains understatedly handsome, without the aggression and fussiness of many new cars. At 4.9m, it's still a big car, and it uses its length to good effect: it is massive inside. Regardless of whether you're a rear-seat passenger or a suitcase, you'll have room to stretch out. As on previous generations, it easily ticks the practical boxes that lets it appeal to families and private hire drivers alike.

But the latest Superb goes beyond just that. What the modern-day Skoda excels at is taking a long, hard look at the trends in automotive design and cherry-picking the ones that actually make for a better car, instead of desperately trying to be fashionable. As a large estate car rather than a trendier SUV, the Superb exemplifies this more than any other model.

It uses up-to-date technology to improve the driving experience and enable useful functions without losing sight of how they're actually used and whether they're fit for purpose. While most other VW Group brands have done away wholesale with buttons and physical ornamentation, Skoda remains somewhat traditional – within reason.

That is not to say that the Superb's dashboard is plastered with buttons. Instead, the minimal but multifunctional 'smart dials' give the driver and passenger quick and easy access to a number of essential functions without requiring them to take their eyes off the road.

The touchscreen doesn't dominate. There is one, of course, and it works quickly, logically and mostly free of lag, but instead your eyes are drawn to the strips of decorative trim and the almost art-deco air vents. Sure, the quality isn't at the level of that of the best premium cars, but then the Superb isn't priced like one.

Skoda has also stepped up its game when it comes to traditional values of ride, handling and powertrain. The Superb, particularly with the diesel engine of our road test car, is quietly great to drive. Instead of in-your-face sportiness, it soothes with excellent seats and a nicely settled, quiet ride. And yet the measured and surprisingly tactile steering and sound balance make it unexpectedly enjoyable on a twisty road.

It makes an outstanding case for diesel engines, too: once warmed up, the 148bhp TDI is smooth, quiet and effortlessly grunty. We subsequently ran one on our long-term fleet, and we saw 60mpg and in excess of 800 miles of range on a regular basis.

Diesel isn't suitable for all buyers, of course, so the Superb is available with a vast range of powertrains that offers something for everyone. The entry-level 1.5-litre mild-hybrid petrol is quiet and capable of 50mpg; there's also a version with the 262bhp 2.0-litre petrol engine from the Golf GTI for fans of family-friendly Q-cars.

Company car drivers are catered for with a plug-in hybrid version with a real-world 70-mile electric range and DC fast-charge to top up, and it still returns 50mpg when the battery is depleted.

The Skoda Superb isn't flashy, and it isn't revolutionary. The problem with revolutions is that they break stuff. Instead, over four generations, Skoda has iterated on the concept of the sensible estate car, using proven VW Group components where it can and doing its own thing when there's a better way. The result is something quietly but decidedly fit for purpose, which is why there's no doubt that the Skoda Superb earns its name more than ever – and five stars in the Autocar road test. **IV**

> **"It soothes with excellent seats and a nicely settled, quiet ride"**

Despite the Superb's size, it expresses Skoda's design language well

It's a comfortable family hauler that's surprisingly entertaining on a B-road
SKODA
KY74 PGF

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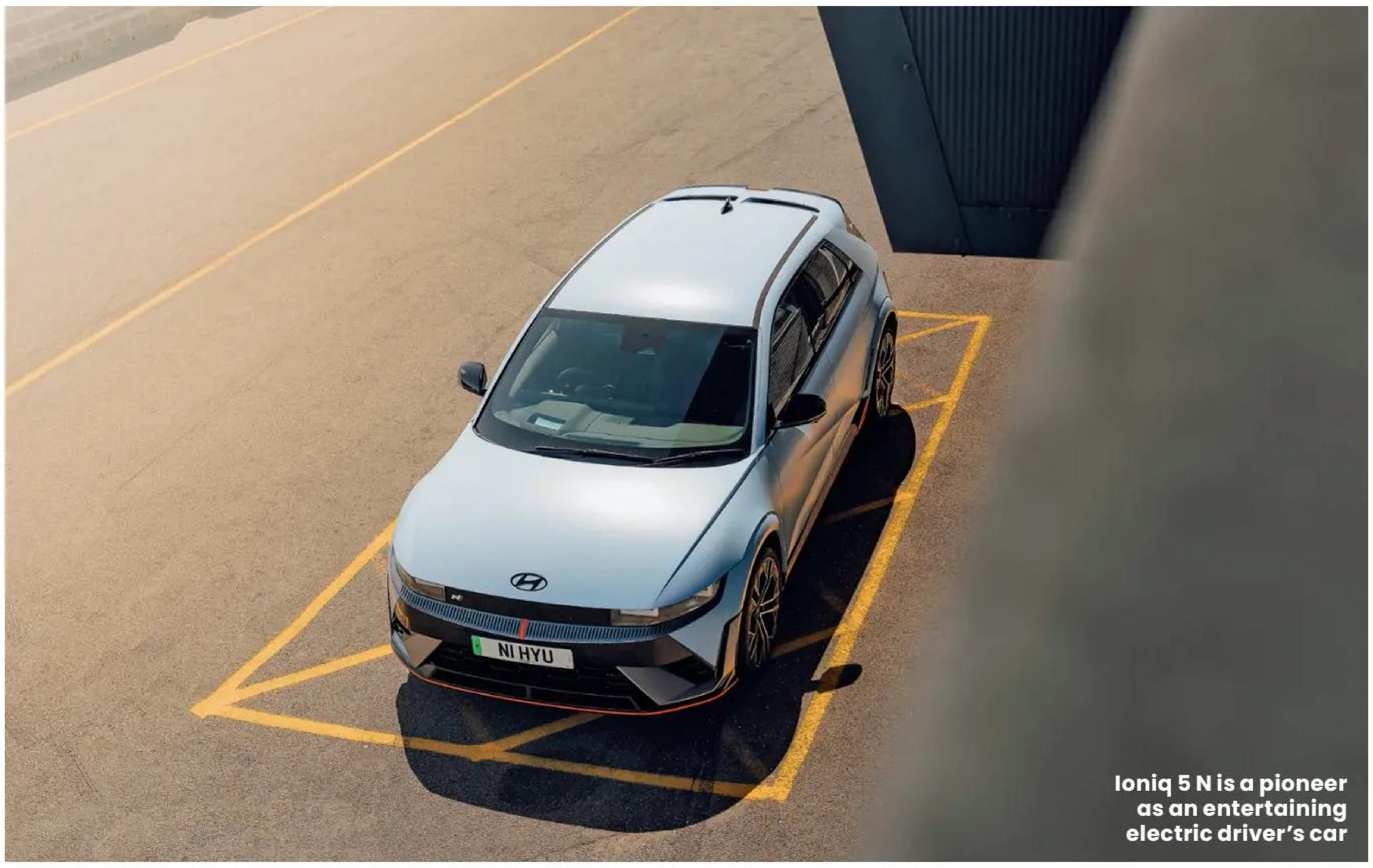
FIVE-STAR CAR

Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

"The Ioniq 5 N is complicated, but it has been conceived with the aim of entertaining"



Ioniq 5 N is a pioneer as an entertaining electric driver's car

The first cars from Hyundai's N performance sub-brand burst onto the scene in the form of petrol-powered, front-wheel-drive turbocharged hot hatchbacks – and they ruffled establishment feathers at every turn.

And these hot hatches certainly liked turns. The i30 N and i20 N were quick, agile and honest, and they demonstrated a fiery appetite for being driven hard. They became some of our favourite driver's hatchbacks, taking the mantle from manufacturers that had lost interest in the subject. They genuinely put Hyundai on the radar for enthusiasts; if you go to a track day today, among the Porsches and Renault Sport models you're likely to find a few N cars.

These upstart newcomers earned the company the right to herald its first electric N division model with its own tongue-in-cheek descriptions such as 'corner rascal'. The Ioniq 5 N is that car – and it's an entirely new kind of driver's car. In pictures you could think it looks like a new hot hatch. But it's bigger, heavier, more powerful and more expensive, and it's packed with hardware – and software – designed to entertain.

It has two electric motors – one at the front, one at the rear – driving all four wheels, with an e-differential at the back and a system total power output of 641bhp. So even though it weighs a not inconsequential 2235kg at the kerb, the Ioniq 5 N is an extremely fast car.

In fact, for a car that will carry the whole family plus luggage, and which has vehicle-to-load capability so you can run a coffee machine at a campsite or even charge another EV from the drive battery, it's borderline supersonic.

At Horiba MIRA proving ground, our test car hit 60mph in 3.5sec and 100mph in 7.8sec, making it just about the fastest traditional super-SUV on the affordable side of a Ferrari Purosangue.

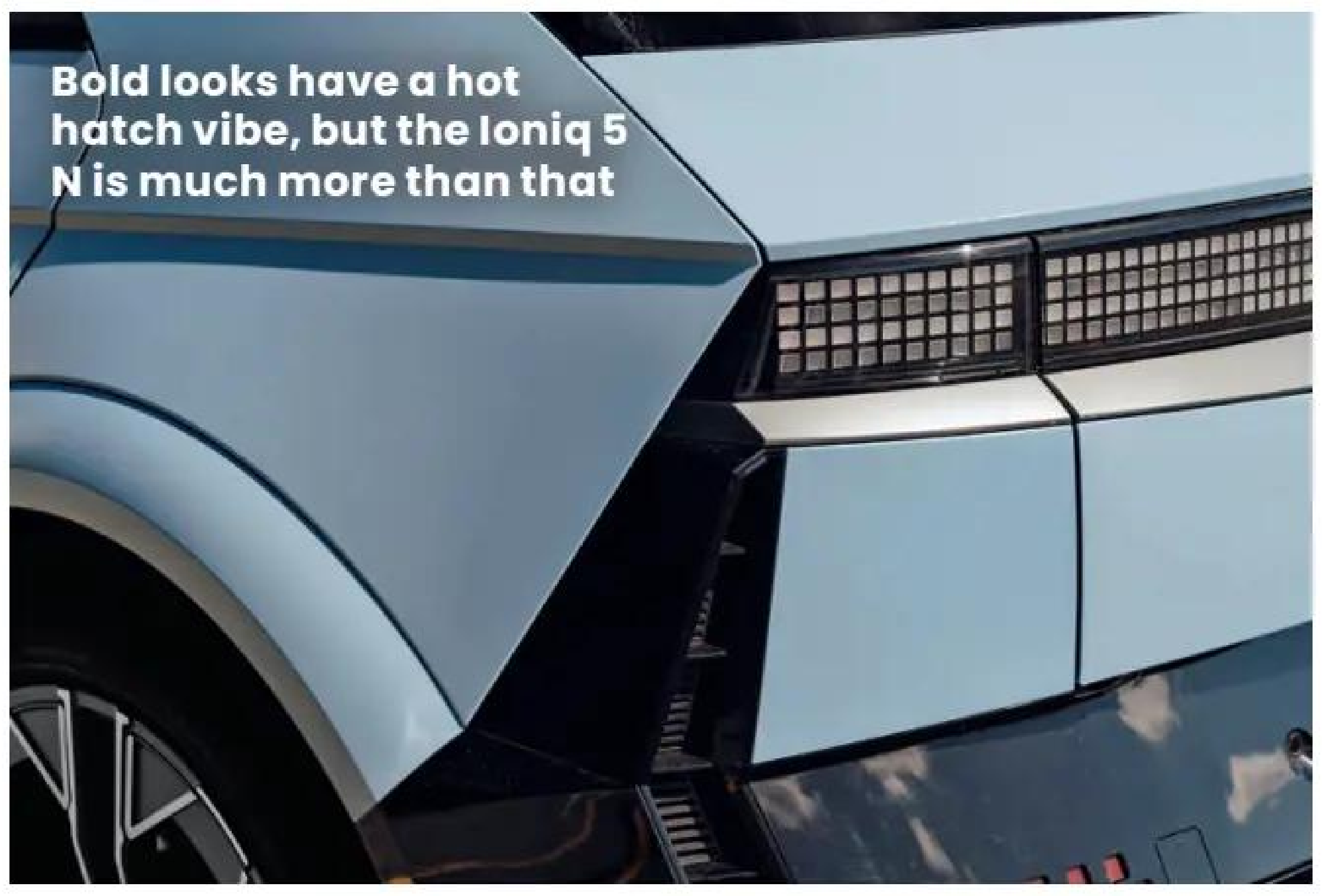
The Ioniq 5 N project was led by Hyundai's Tyrone Johnson, who was also behind the Mk3 Focus RS during his previous career at Ford. Johnson says that, to him, the Ioniq 5 N handles as though it weighs 1700kg, not the 2200kg-plus it does in reality. He's not wrong.

The first N-badged EV from the South Korean marque with the Nürburgring test base and the nous to occasionally test its prototypes on British roads, 5000 miles from home, is blindingly good fun and capable of rising to any occasion in dynamic terms. The Ioniq 5 N is complicated in software terms, but it's a swift and natural-feeling companion that has been conceived with the aim of entertaining rather than mindlessly impressing with vast grip and accelerative clout.

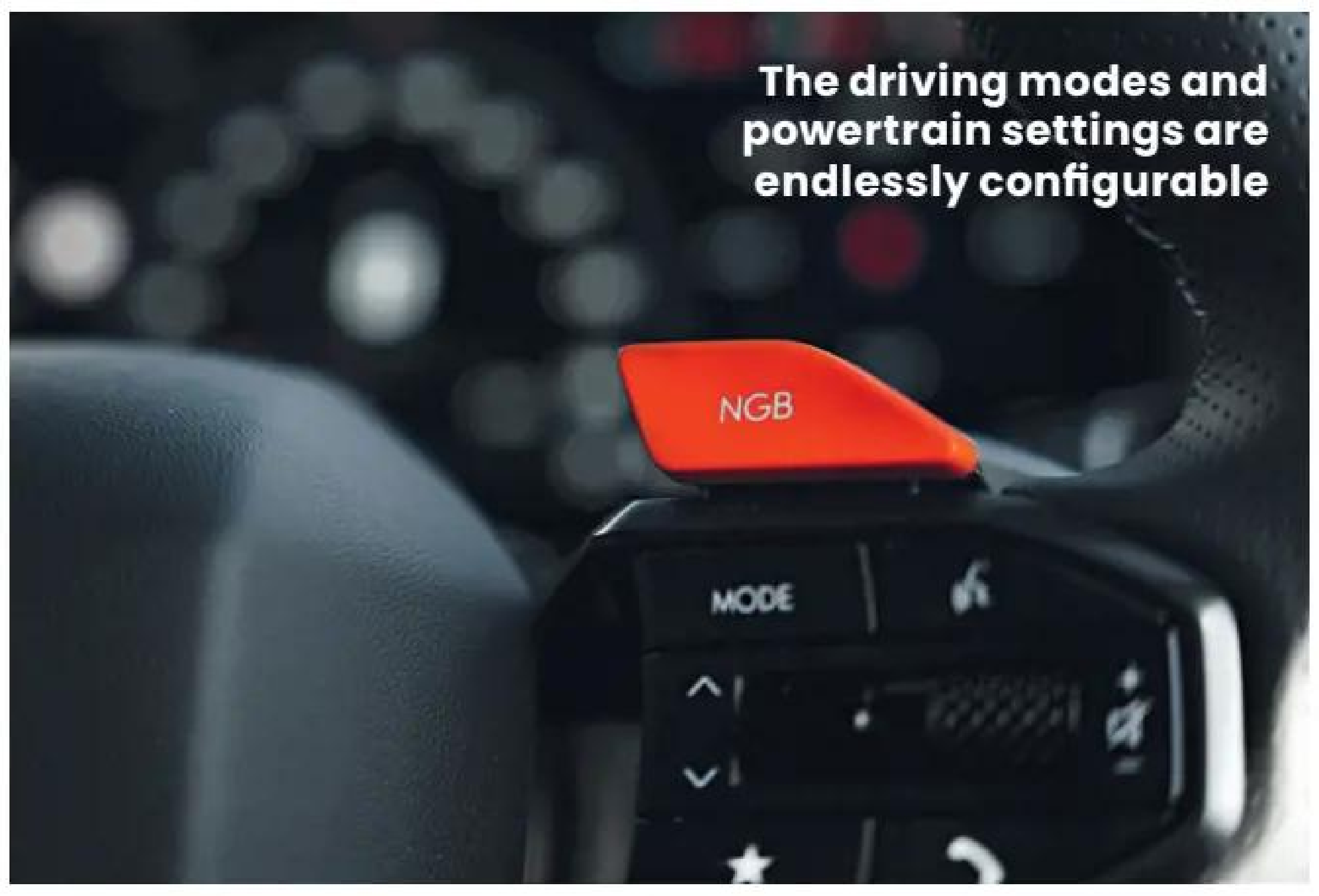
Enjoy plenteous drive modes? Then you will love this N. There are 972 possible combinations in all, and that's before you take into account the traction control and ESP (three settings) and the N Torque Distribution slider, which can distribute more power to the front or to the rear, depending on your preference.

Reading about this hot hatch-cum-super-saloon on paper, it is perhaps difficult to imagine that all its tricks and innovations – fake gearshifts and engine sounds among them – wouldn't feel a touch gimmicky. Certainly, you wonder whether the established German performance brands simply take themselves too seriously to explore, for example, synthesised gearshifts or throttle-adjustability that at times can seem almost cartoonishly easy to generate. And perhaps that is their loss.

Cars that truly change the game have always been vanishingly rare, and that remains true in the topsy-turvy era the automotive industry is currently weathering. Yet the Ioniq 5 N is just that: a game-changer. The electric driver's car has landed, and it will slot into most of our lives with ease – and plenty of smiles. **MP**



Bold looks have a hot hatch vibe, but the Ioniq 5 N is much more than that



The driving modes and powertrain settings are endlessly configurable

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BEST FUN EV

Alpine A290

Few electric cars generated as much anticipation in the months leading up to their launch as the A290. A car developed by the same people who gave us unadulterated thrillers such as the Renaultsport Clio 182 should be as easy to drive quickly as it is engaging on a twisty road; the fact that it's electric will then naturally not be the main focus. And that's exactly what happened here.

"It picks up where Renault's hot hatches left off," wrote Matt Prior after his first taster. We crowned it the winner of our Best Fun EV test earlier this year (see scorecard below) and – putting its powertrain to one side – it's one of the most involving, responsive affordable driver's cars we have seen for a while.

The A290 is worthy of such praise in pretty much every environment you're likely to take it. On a track, its low centre of gravity and light, accurate steering make it more agile and energetic than any of its rivals. It has a totally natural ability to flow from corner to corner without you having to continually jab the throttle and turn in with such ferocity that your passengers feel ill. Its acceleration is delivered in a similarly measured way, whether you go for the 178bhp version or the full-fat 217bhp model. But that doesn't mean the car lacks response. A gentle step-off from rest gives way to enough poke for any B-road, and when you decide you no longer want to travel quickly, the A110-sourced brakes are both strong and linear, with a positive response and fantastically intuitive pedal feel.

The A290 is as practical as the Renault 5 it's based on, too. The Google-based infotainment works well, and there's a useful row of physical buttons for the ventilation system. Okay, a cupholder or two wouldn't go amiss, but in all other respects this car is as intuitive to use as it is to drive.

It might not be the first electric car to break the mould and show the world that EVs can appeal to enthusiasts, but the A290 rewrites the formula in an appealing, unique and accessible way. It's not the most powerful, the biggest or the most efficient car ever, but neither was the Clio 182. **JB**

Judges' scores

	SAUNDERS	VERPRAET	PARROTT	BRYCE	GRAND TOTAL
Alpine A290 GTS	42	35	41	40	**158**
Cupra Born VZ	40	37	39	37	**153**
Mini Cooper SE Sport	36	42	32	41	**151**
Alfa Junior Elettrica Veloce	30	29	30	31	**120**
MG 4 EV Extended Range	34	30	27	28	**119**

BRITAIN'S BEST DRIVER'S CAR

McLaren Artura

Who doesn't love an epic narrative arc, eh? The McLaren Artura has certainly been on one of those. Back in 2022, the example yours truly was driving on the press launch at the Ascari circuit fell victim to a pretty serious "thermal incident". There were, in fact, two of these 'incidents' on the launch that week. One of them, arguably the result of human procedural error and bad luck (new fuel hoses that hadn't been torqued to the correct tightness), resulted in quite a large fire.

My car's spot of bother – lots of smoke, a dash full of warning lights, a knackered cooling system and an immobile car at turn 16 but no flames – was actually more serious in the longer term because it resulted from a genuine design flaw: an intercooler whose internal structures had, in a sense, been laid out backwards.

That level of detail is likely to fall to McLaren's supplier base, at least to a point – but a flaw is a flaw. And, after the event, Woking's engineers diagnosed and set about fixing it with admirable haste – and then, needless to say, they briefed the particular journalist to whom it had 'happened' as fully as you would expect.

So now every Artura has what I like to think of as the Saunders-spec cooling system. The car also has more power than it did originally, along with new adaptive dampers, new engine mounts and new exhaust systems, with a bulkhead-mounted sound symposer that enhances the rather lovely – and faintly Porsche 911-like – wide-angle V6 noise they make.

Suffice to say, the Artura was already a good car when it very narrowly missed the podium at Britain's Best Driver's Car 2022. But after those tweaks that gave it extra layers of combustive drama (in the right way) and dynamic appeal, it fairly waltzed to BBDC victory last year.

Its versatility as a mid-engined supercar really is special. You feel like you could, perfectly comfortably, do the office commute in it, run errands and take it on trips away. And, because it's so easy to get into and so lovely just to drive 'normally', you would want to. That singular usability also runs parallel with a level of performance, handling precision, control feedback and all-round driver engagement that absolutely nothing else could live with on track at Cadwell Park last autumn.

Honestly, the Artura nuked the field. Having looked, for a while, like a bit of an albatross, it has become one of the new McLaren's crowning glories. And it's proof that, now as always in the car business, a little bit of faith can go an awfully long way. **MS**

> *"The Artura's versatility as a mid-engined supercar really is special"*

Judges' scores

	FRANKEL Rd Trk Tot	DISDALE Rd Trk Tot	PRIOR Rd Trk Tot	SAUNDERS Rd Trk Tot	LANE Rd Trk Tot	VERPRAET Rd Trk Tot	Total
McLaren Artura	22-22-44	22-23-45	21-22-43	23-24-47	23-23-46	15-20-35	260
Analogue Automotive Supersport	20-21-41	18-20-38	20-19-39	18-23-41	20-24-44	24-21-45	248
Aston Martin Vantage	20-19-39	20-21-41	21-17-38	19-20-39	20-21-41	23-23-46	244
Ariel Nomad 2	20-20-40	21-22-43	20-22-42	20-18-38	20-20-40	21-18-39	242
Hyundai Ioniq 5 N	17-16-33	21-21-42	19-18-37	18-22-40	19-18-37	18-18-36	225
Toyota GR Yaris	18-19-37	21-20-41	18-18-36	18-17-35	19-18-37	16-14-30	216
Volkswagen Golf R	15-18-33	19-17-36	16-16-32	17-20-37	17-17-34	14-20-34	206
Noble M500	15-19-34	16-18-34	15-19-34	19-18-37	18-19-37	5-12-17	193
Ford Mustang Dark Horse automatic	15-16-31	15-18-33	15-16-31	16-15-31	15-15-30	15-13-28	184
Lotus Emeya S	14-15-29	18-17-35	15-15-30	12-11-23	17-17-34	12-12-24	175

Matt Prior missed the road judging day, so his road scores were averaged from those of all the other judges

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BEST DREAM CAR

Lamborghini Revuelto

Until very recently, the idea of Lamborghini's top-billing V12 being a 'dream car' would have raised eyebrows among the supercar-weary cynics. They would have a point, too. The old Aventador was dashing and sounded outrageous, but it also represented a good deal of inconvenience for not a vast degree of dynamic reward. Describing the car as style over substance would be unjust, but the almost wilful lack of mechanical subtlety and the sense that you were merely managing the show rather than revelling in it meant half an hour behind the wheel was enough. The equivalent Ferrari always had more layers and more intrigue.

The Revuelto marks a shift in tone for Sant'Agata – and not simply because, with the help of electrification, it's the first series-production Lamborghini to develop more than 1000bhp. Gone is the Aventador's automated-manual gearbox, replaced by a compact, cutting-edge dual-clutch automatic transmission. Four-wheel drive now comes courtesy not of an antiquated Haldex coupling but via rapid-acting electric motors dedicated solely to the front axle, leaving an all-new, 6.5-litre V12 to serve the back axle alone. It's a thoroughly modern product. Elsewhere, it has a cabin of fabulous quality, with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility. It tramlines less than the Aventador, as well as riding more deftly, and you can go into 'incognito' mode (all things are relative) at a press of the 'EV' button on the steering wheel. Genuinely useful, that.

The Revuelto heralds Lamborghini's new era of driver satisfaction

It's the dynamic package that properly moves the game on, though. The Revuelto has a bigger footprint than the Aventador but is in another dimension of handling appeal, partly thanks to a new, ultra-fast-computing control unit that marshals the ESP, torque split and torque vectoring. You can read the full road test for more (4 December 2024), but it boils down to the fact that the biggest, baddest, fastest Lambo now feels cohesive and ready to entertain its driver, inviting them to take certain liberties, as Ferraris do. The Aventador held you at arm's length, but you can get stuck into the Revuelto, which, in a 1001bhp supercar with a naturally aspirated V12 and looks that stop traffic, is quite an experience. It's also the outright fastest car we have yet tested, toppling Bugatti's Veyron Super Sport. A dream car? Yep, and then some. **RL**

“The biggest, baddest, fastest Lambo now feels cohesive and ready to entertain”

BEST VALUE CAR

Dacia Duster

The Dacia Duster is not the cheapest car on sale today; it’s not even the cheapest Dacia. In fact, save for the recently introduced Bigster, it’s the most expensive car Dacia sells. But it is outstandingly good value, because it simply offers so much for so (relatively) little.

Don’t make the mistake of labelling the Duster as a bare-bones budget car, though. It’s a fashionable and popular SUV, for starters, and it really leans into the junior off-roader feel with boxy yet confident looks, big wheels and an expansive, flat bonnet. Hop in, and the angular dashboard and pillbox windscreen could almost fool you that you’re in a Defender.

The Duster has the sort of style you wouldn’t ordinarily expect from a budget car, and it has the substance to back it up. It provides all the passenger and luggage space you would expect from a compact SUV, along with a touchscreen infotainment system that does smartphone mirroring and other essentials.

It doesn’t have a particularly plush interior, although you wouldn’t expect one of those at a sub-£20,000 starting price, but it manages to make a virtue of the hard plastic materials that dress most of the cabin. With a characterful design and a splash of colour, it all comes off as rugged rather than cheap.

This Mk3 Duster is based on the Renault Group’s proven CMF-B platform, which makes it very decent to drive, too. Supple-riding and with measured, competent handling, it negotiates most roads without complaint.

With the full hybrid powertrain, the Duster finally gains an automatic gearbox option – and one that can achieve 50mpg. That said, our choice would be the mild hybrid, which is cheaper yet still offers decent economy while adding a bit of control and engagement courtesy of its manual gearbox. The mild hybrid is also available with four-wheel drive, which turns the Duster into a true budget off-roader that really can punch above its weight. Or at least its price.

The Dacia Duster capitalises on the seemingly obvious idea of offering buyers everything they need, nothing they don’t and just enough of the things they want. At a time when most new cars are becoming eye-wateringly expensive, it’s no wonder that Dacias have become wildly popular with private buyers. **IV**

The Duster eschews excess to provide the right amount of what private buyers need

Chunky, fresh styling gives the Duster far more than an economy car feel

Four-wheel drive is an option, making for a true budget off-roader

AUTOCAR AWARDS 2025
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"A 107bhp electric motor gives the eHybrid plenty of electric oomph"

BEST HYBRID

VW Golf eHybrid

Engineers don't like plug-in hybrids. It's the 'two engines rather than one' factor, and all that extra associated ballast. Marketing types have always liked them, though – dare I say, because they understand people, rather than machines, that little bit better.

And road testers? Well, I've always liked the idea – and lately I've liked the execution a whole lot more than I used to. Cars such as the Volkswagen Golf eHybrid – specifically, what they cost to buy, how far they can go on electric power and how you might therefore actually use one – are the reasons why they appeal.

A decade or so ago, when they were first emerging, PHEVs typically had pretty minimal electric range and usability. They also came at a hefty premium and, perhaps most critically, were supported by a company car tax system that, in the UK certainly, gave them such a competitive advantage as fleet cars that there was little onus on manufacturers to make their electric usability much more than tokenistic.

Now, however, the tax and WLTP certification systems are changing to make PHEVs work harder to earn their place (Google 'Euro 6e-bis' for details on how). And, wouldn't you know it, we're getting better cars as a result.

The Golf eHybrid doesn't make a fuss about its credentials

The Golf eHybrid shows precisely how. It is, on the face of it, just another Golf. It's priced pretty much like one (from £36k), and it looks like one – no novelty headlights or flashy detailing here. And it drives like one, for the most part.

In fact, it drives more like two. The car's 107bhp electric motor gives it plenty of electric oomph, so you don't need to rouse the combustion engine to keep up with traffic. The nearly 20kWh usable-capacity battery gives a real-world electric range of 66 miles in mixed urban and extra-urban use, according to our road testing. That's more than enough to make a real difference to how often you might need to fuel it and how much fuel it might get through. Moreover, it also accepts DC rapid charging – so it's easy enough to turn 66 miles into a return trip of more than 100, if you're so inclined.

Thanks mainly to that transformed electric usability, our road test car recorded an aggregated test efficiency in excess of 100mpg over a week with us. It was kept overnight where

it could be charged but otherwise not driven or used any differently to any other road test car.

So the question is, who wouldn't want a 100mpg family hatchback that is otherwise as good as a Volkswagen Golf? 'Plugging it in' may not come for free but, on this evidence, it would absolutely be worthwhile. **MS**

It drives like a regular Golf, but with close to a 70-mile electric range

No dynamic fireworks, but the EV3 handles nicely and rides well on smaller wheels

BEST ELECTRIC CAR

Kia EV3

‘EVangelists’ love to shout that range doesn't matter because many people can charge at home and because the rapid-charge network has become really quite sophisticated. But the fact is that autonomy remains a major hurdle in many buyers' minds.

The smart car maker just plays the game – and Kia is smart. The latest electric battleground is C-segment SUVs – in other words, roughly Volkswagen Golf-sized crossovers. While a lot of rivals were muddling around with 60-70kWh batteries, Kia released the EV3, an 81.4kWh mic-drop with up to 375 miles of range. The clincher? At £36,005, it's cheaper than the shorter-range Niro EV it is in effect serving to replace. Now that's what I call progress.

As we've come to expect from Kia's product, the EV3 doesn't just play a numbers game that only looks good on paper. Instead, this is an appealing, well-rounded car that stands up to comparison with a growing crop of rivals.

On the road, it asks very little of its driver. The EV3 just adapts to their driving style with intuitive controls, adjustable regenerative braking and a pleasantly middle-of-the-road handling balance. If you go for the entry-level Air trim on smaller wheels, it rides gently too.

The airy interior seats you on comfortable chairs with a raised driving position; ahead of you are just enough physical switches, as well as a slick infotainment system – an eight- and an 80-year-old would feel equally at home here. And both of them should have no problem storing all of their stuff in the big boot.

As something of a pioneer of the mainstream EV with the original e-Niro, Kia has plenty of experience with such cars – and here it shows. The EV3 manages very creditable efficiency, and while its peak rapid-charging speed of 129kW is below the class average, it actually did better than most rivals when we hooked it up to a DC charger as part of our road test.

Quick charging speeds help to make range matter less than it did but, like it or not, it still does. It's one thing to put a massive battery in an expensive car, but it's another to do it with a reasonably priced family car. That's what Kia has done with the EV3, though. It's the electric car for 2025: without shouting about itself, it has just made EV ownership that little bit easier. **IV**

EV3 punches above its price point by offering up to 375 miles of range

Interior mixes modern tech with welcomingly conventional controls

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BEST SMALL CAR

Fiat Grande Panda

The Fiat Grande Panda could easily have been dull and unimaginative. Something that, because of cost-cutting and its relatively low asking price, was bereft of unique, headline-grabbing features. But it didn't turn out that way.

The Grande Panda is what happens when a car maker pays attention to and respects not only its heritage but also out-of-the-box thinking to give its new model some genuine appeal among both loyal and first-time buyers. From the 'Panda' indents stamped into the body to the infotainment bezel shaped like Fiat's old test track atop its Lingotto factory, the car represents a creative, refreshingly cheery attitude to design – courtesy of our Design Hero, François Leboine (p54) – of which the industry needs to show more.

All of this is available with a starting price of just over £18,000, rising to around £21,000 for the EV. Even that latter price point makes it one of the cheapest electric cars out there, beaten only by the Dacia Spring, BYD Dolphin Surf and Leapmotor T03, none of which seems close to matching the Fiat's levels of character.

Its equipment levels are equally impressive. As standard, you get nifty 16in white steel wheels, a 10.25in touchscreen, air conditioning, cruise control, rear parking sensors and a feature so clever you wonder why it wasn't introduced decades ago: a retractable charging cable.

To drive, the Grande Panda mixes comfortably with its peers. Whether you go for the 111bhp EV or the 99bhp 1.2-litre mild hybrid, it doesn't feel dwarfed by traffic on the open road. In its natural urban habitat, the Grande Panda's upright body (the proportions of which deliberately mimic those of the original Panda) and generous glasshouse make for excellent all-round visibility, and the strong initial acceleration provided by the motor makes it zippy.

That upright body also pays dividends for interior space, with enough head room and leg room that taller passengers will fit comfortably, plus there's an impressive boot capacity of up to 421 litres and plenty of storage space elsewhere, from the deep tray built into the dashboard to generous compartments in the centre console.

That blend of usability, affordability and style is why the Grande Panda is our Best Small Car. It's just as spacious, frugal, cost-effective, attractive and cheap to run as its fiercest rivals – but there's a healthy dose of appealing creativity in there for good measure. **JB**

BEST 4x4

Land Rover Defender Octa

"Its happy place is pretty much anywhere you want it to be"

JLR's new hero Defender, the Octa, is an intriguing performance car that we have come to know really rather well in a pretty short space of time.

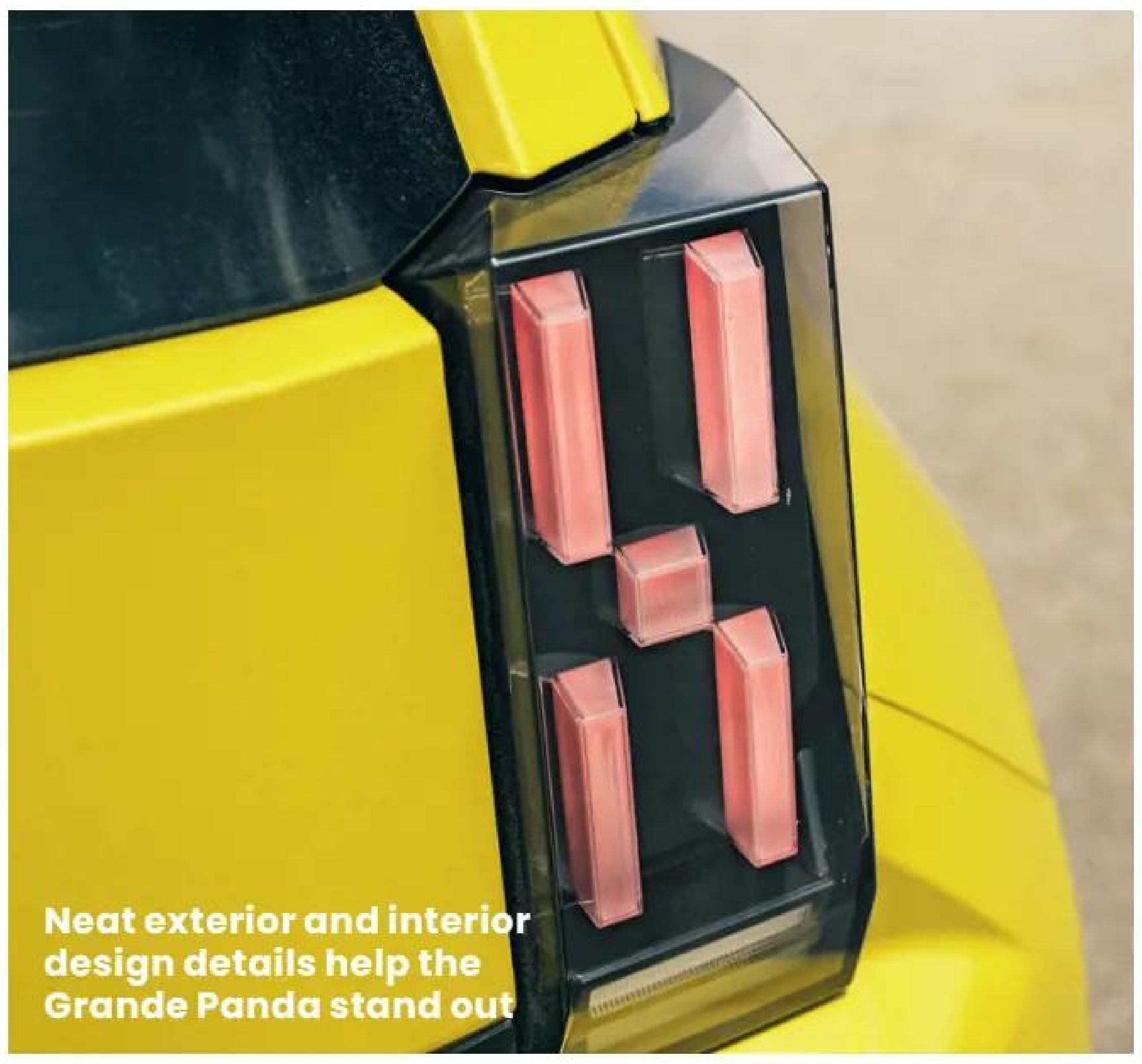
It was only in January of this year when the chance came to take to the coastal roads, mountain trails, valley basins and sand dunes of the Western Cape, South Africa, in this car. As introductions go, it was every bit as ambitious as the Octa's dynamic brief, and it demonstrated very fully what this Land Rover is all about: not physics-bending on-road performance, but rather a boosted envelope of usability every bit as long as it is broad.

Most two-and-a-half-tonne super-SUVs achieve their sub-4.0sec 0-62mph acceleration times by switching onto performance road tyres. Some increase on-road cornering grip by doubling down on their sport suspension settings, giving up ground clearance and wheel articulation along with all the true off-road capability that goes with them. Some become so wedded to the notion of fast road or track use that any meaningful dual-purposeness simply evaporates out of the window. They become luxury super-saloons on stilts.

Not this one. The Defender Octa's air suspension system and interlinked '6D' damping and anti-roll control systems give it all the body control it needs in Dynamic mode without taking freedom of movement away from the wheels at other times. Its 'Cup' tyres are, in fact, Goodyear Duratrac advanced all-terrain 'knobblies', which use a special triple-ply construction that makes them even tougher and more versatile off the road. Its off-road stats have increased, not decreased – to a Herculean 1000mm of wading depth, 43deg of departure angle and 323mm of ground clearance. Those figures are unequalled among cars of its ilk.

The Octa's happy place is, well, pretty much anywhere you want it to be. It's especially at home on loose gravel and dirt, though, where you can still carry plenty of speed but also where the car's special suspension and traction control systems really come to the fore. Its party trick is a special anti-lock braking tune, accessible in the special 'Octa' mode, which allows the front wheels to dig into the surface just a little bit, building bow waves of scree ahead of each contact patch only to then use them to help rotate the chassis on turn-in and gently drift this 627bhp behemoth towards the apex as if it were some 2.7-tonne, two-metre-tall, Mk1 Ford Escort.

Since our first drive took place, a full road test and a triple-test meeting with an Ariel Nomad 2 and Ford Mustang Mach-E Rally have only served to confirm our sense of awe at the sheer range of high-octane talent and capability that the Defender Octa has. It's simply 'more Defender' in almost every conceivable way. **MS**



Neat exterior and interior design details help the Grande Panda stand out

Fresh, cutesy-rugged styling gives the Grande Panda real urban appeal

The Octa turns up the wick on the Defender's off-road strengths

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

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BEST MANUFACTURER

MG

Buoyant MG flexed its muscles with audacious Cyberster halo car

Imagine the launch of a fictitious new car. It's a luxurious-feeling two-seat roadster, an electric vehicle with two motors generating a total output of 503bhp. It has an electrically operated folding hood, styling so radical that it appears to be almost sculpted like a Lotus Evija at the rear and the most spectacular pair of remote electrically operated scissor doors.

It looks a million dollars, then – and it goes like it: it is extraordinarily fast, this four-wheel-drive, open-top, grand touring sports car, able to go to 62mph from a standstill in just 3.2sec. And yet it costs under £60,000, fully loaded: some fancy colours aside, all of its generous roster of equipment is included in the basic price.

Who would you think might produce such a car? These days, most car makers don't make any sports models at all; others think they must have internal combustion engines. Surely it would take someone with performance experience, big heritage and a vast model array. Who, in today's market, would be that bold?

If, 15 years ago, when the unimpressive MG 6 was launched, you had said it would be MG, I don't think you would have been taken very seriously. Even four or five years ago, when MG's products were all stolid, uneventful, uninspiring-to-look-at, low-priced value products, would you have predicted this? In fact, even when there's one parked outside the office, I'm not sure I entirely believe it. And yet MG has not just thought about it, made a design study or mulled it over: you can go and order one, right now.

The Cyberster isn't the core vehicle in the MG range, but it epitomises just how far this manufacturer has come. It has been nearly two decades since SAIC took over the defunct MG brand, seeking a name that was recognisable to Western consumers and managing it carefully (some customers think it is still a British brand). It has a design and engineering hub in the Midlands, but the core work, and the manufacturing, is performed in China.

But it's that blend – a name we recognise and some European influence on design and driving character, but with the cost advantages of Chinese ownership and manufacture – that has been behind the meteoric rise in MG's popularity. You could point to the sales growth of the company around the start of the decade, establishing MG as one of the UK's top 10 manufacturers, as a reason alone to make it our Best Manufacturer. But it's the quality, the value and now the design appeal of the products that really make it compelling. The Cyberster represents a yardstick for where MG has come from, but it also feels like a springboard for what it will bring us next. **MP**

> *"The quality and the design appeal make MG compelling"*

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"It's a car that takes a bit of time to warm to but then reveals plenty of strengths"

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 4373**

FORD EXPLORER

Did its VW platform and an EV powertrain leave space for any Ford DNA?

WHY WE RAN IT To find out if the Blue Oval's first European-built electric car – with Volkswagen underpinnings – really is a true Ford

The estimable Steve Cropley has already explained things better than I ever could. When I took delivery of this Ford Explorer, the question set for me to answer concerned whether an EV with Volkswagen underpinnings could really be a true Ford.

I had several months to consider. Then Steve borrowed the Explorer for a Ford-themed UK road trip (30 April) and pretty much nailed my brief in two days. As he put it, Ford took a VW platform, built a sensible, honest family car and added just enough handling pep to evoke the brand's turn-of-the-century glory days and make the Explorer feel distinct from its German cousins and worthy of bearing the Blue Oval.

Well, I agree with Steve on all counts. Early in my days with the Explorer, I found myself counting the VW parts – which include plenty of the switchgear and even the key fob. But beyond those bits, it looks and feels like a Ford. And you know what? VW switchgear is pretty good, generally (particularly since Ford hasn't ported over the controversial infotainment sliders). Some of the switchgear in Rachel Burgess's opulent Bentley Bentayga long-termer is recognisable from elsewhere in the VW Group, and if it's good enough for Bentley, then it's fine for Ford. And, really, why change stuff just for the sake of it?

And while the Explorer doesn't quite have the pep of a Fiesta or a Focus, it certainly holds its own with any of Ford's petrol SUVs.

So, basically, Steve was right. Case closed, then. Damn it, you might as well turn over and read Steve's latest thoughts on his Jeep Wrangler. Actually, hang on, don't go just yet, because there's still a separate yet related question to answer: what's the Explorer like to live with? After all, even if it looks like a Ford, feels like a Ford and, er, quacks like a Ford, that doesn't matter if it can't deliver on the brief of an electric family crossover.

Well, generally, I liked it. It's the sort of car that takes a bit of time to warm to but reveals plenty of strengths over an extended period.

The styling featured plenty of SUV cues but had enough edge that it looks better in the metal than in photos. It's well sized too: despite that boxy exterior, it was pleasingly compact and proved very easy to place on the road. It had strong all-round visibility as well.

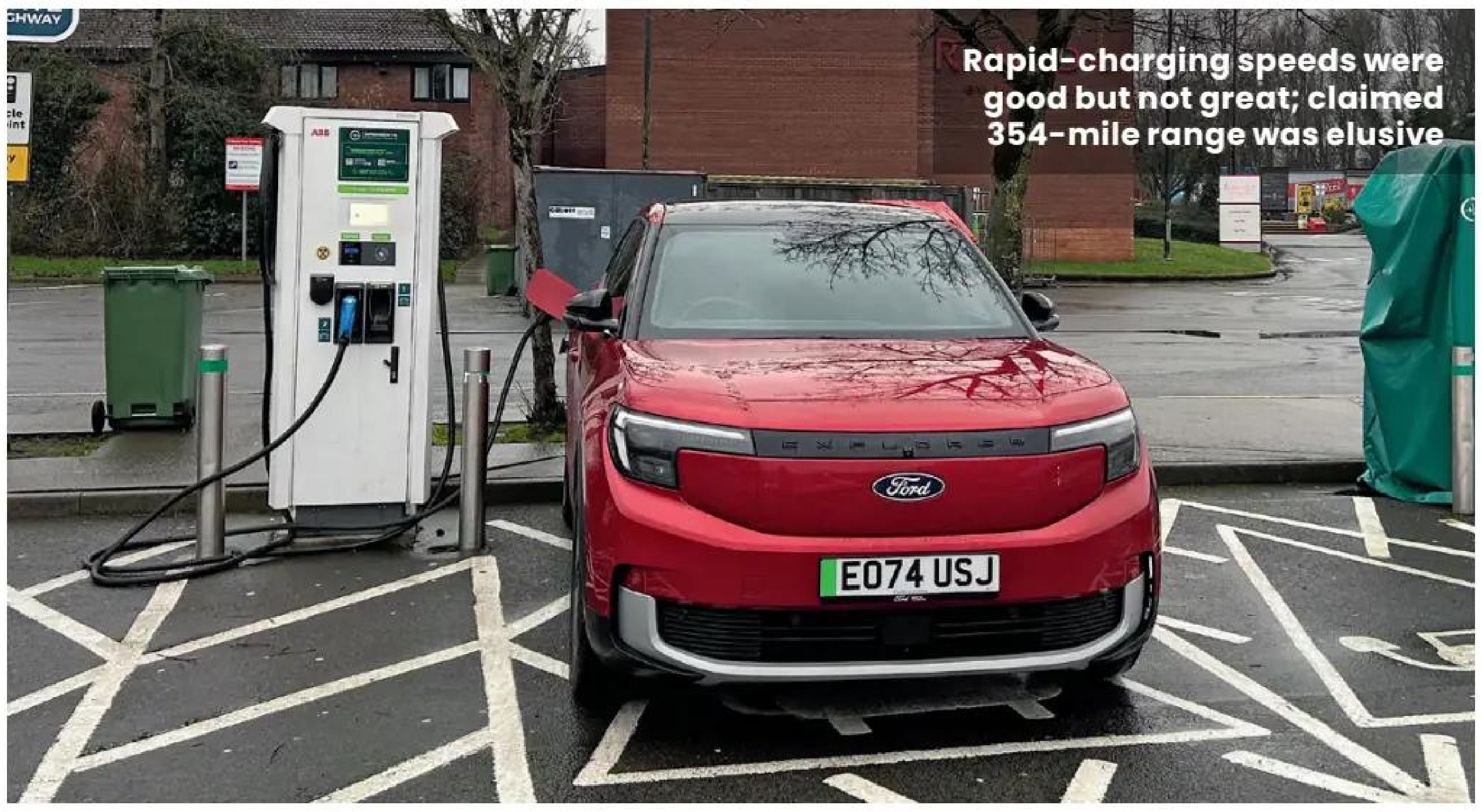
Typically for a Ford, the interior was pleasant and comfortable enough but definitely majored on practicality rather than premium sheen. Nothing wrong with that, though. One bit of VW switchgear that did annoy was the window control panel on the driver's door, which featured tactile 'buttons' and made me press a toggle to

SECOND OPINION

The Explorer has everything that you really need in a car: a capacious interior, decent efficiency and undemanding usability. I wish Ford had thought about the 'wants' more, though, because more luxurious interior materials and sweeter handling than you get from its Volkswagen cousins wouldn't go amiss. **JH**

Gear toggle is straight out of Wolfsburg

Ford-tuned steering is above average for a car like this



Rapid-charging speeds were good but not great; claimed 354-mile range was elusive

Wheels are big but are wrapped up in thick sidewalls

operate the front or rear windows.

As previously reported, the big, portrait-oriented touchscreen is a bit in your face at first but generally works quite well, and once I had learned where the key controls were, I didn't rue the relative lack of physical buttons.

My Explorer was in my ideal electric SUV spec: a single motor paired with the biggest (77kWh) battery possible. I struggle to see why you would need the extra performance of the dual-motor version, because this car had more than enough accelerative juice to keep pace in traffic and cruised happily at motorway speeds.

Much of my running was spent either pootling around town or on trips up and down the motorway, which is always a good test of range. Officially it's 354 miles, but when I filled the battery, the most I ever saw on the range indicator was 302 miles – and I managed to cover only 270 miles before I needed to plug in again. Still, that's not a disgraceful range for an electric SUV, and while I generally was achieving around 3.5mpkWh, on his outing Steve returned just above 4mpkWh. He isn't just annoyingly efficient when it comes to turns of phrase, then.

The caveat to the range is that it was definitely very temperature-dependent. When the Explorer arrived in far colder weather, the indicated range when the battery was full was closer to 250 miles.

That's a disappointing variance, especially because the heat pump fitted to my test car was a £1050 option. Still, it was relative: last year I ran a pumpless Honda e:Ny1 and its range suffered so much from colder conditions that I was deterred from putting the heater on.

The other four-figure option fitted to my Explorer was the £1300 Driver Assistance Pack, which added a head-up display, lane change assistance, parking assistance and a 360deg parking camera. Even if the Explorer is quite easy to place, due to its compact size, it's probably worth the outlay for that camera, which was generally excellent and made reversing a cinch.

But adding options adds cost, and that's where my Explorer does give pause for thought. With a price of £53,125 as tested, it's quite pricey compared with rivals. In fact, it costs more than the Volkswagen ID 4, which has essentially the same running gear but is bigger. You can understand why, since VW is clearly making profit from selling its hardware and Ford then needs its own mark-up to compensate.

That makes the Explorer slightly harder to recommend. It might come down to what deals you can find. But there's enough character and Ford-infused charm here to make up for that extra outlay if you really want an EV bearing a Blue Oval. A proper Ford, then, and a good family crossover.

And now you really can turn over to read Steve's latest thoughts on his Wrangler.

JAMES ATTWOOD

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
james.attwood@haymarket.com

TEST DATA

FORD EXPLORER EXTENDED RANGE PREMIUM RWD

MILEAGE

At start 1231
At end 4373

PRICES

List price new £49,975
List price now £49,975
Price as tested £53,125

OPTIONS

Driver Assistance Pack £1300, heat pump £1050, Rapid Red paint £800

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed range 354 miles
Battery 82/77kWh (total/usable)
Test average 3.4mpkWh
Test best 4.2mpkWh
Test worst 2.8mpkWh
Real-world range 262 miles
Max charge rate 135kW

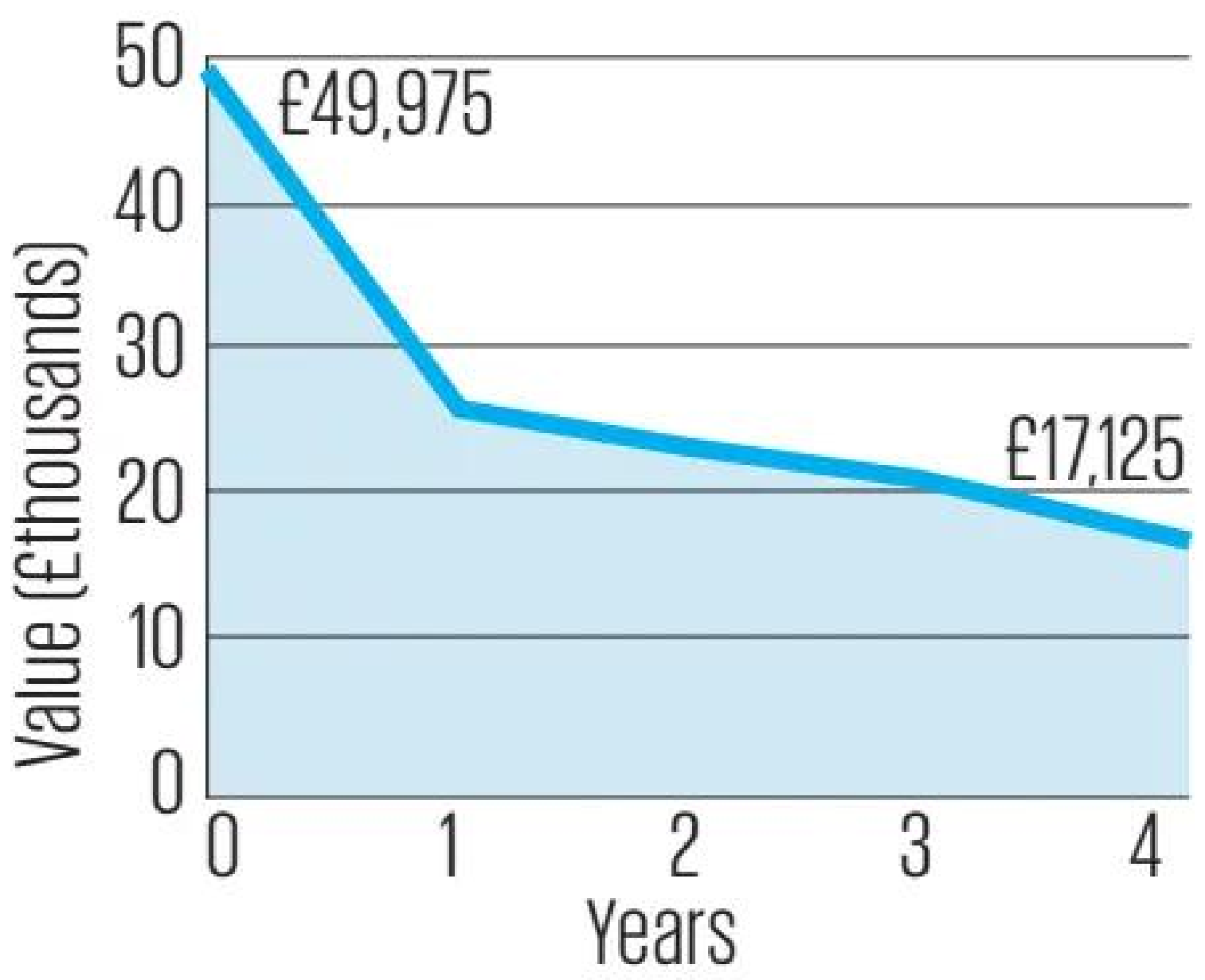
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 6.4sec
Top speed 112mph
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Max power 282bhp
Max torque 254lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Boot 470 litres
Wheels 8.0Jx20in (f), 9.0x20in (r)
Tyres 235/50 R20 H XL (f), 235/45 R20 H XL (r), Continental EcoContact 6
Kerb weight 2102kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £420 pcm
CO_2 0g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £277.20
Running costs including fuel £277.20
Cost per mile 9 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

2 Apr, 16 Apr, 7 May, 14 May, 28 May, 11 Jun, 18 Jun

LOVE IT

SENSIBLY SIZED
This is a rare case of a car that is smaller than it looks – something of which I approve.

BIG SCREEN
The touchscreen is large but that makes it practical, and it's a decent infotainment system.

HANDLING PEP
The Explorer is no Focus ST to drive, but there is some real Ford DNA in its handling.

LOATHE IT

WINTER WOES
The range shrinks more than you would like in chilly conditions, even with a heat pump fitted.

LIMITED CAPACITY
It's a decently sized boot but there's not the spacious SUV storage you might expect.

JEEP WRANGLER

We remove the roof and head into the concrete jungle on urban safari

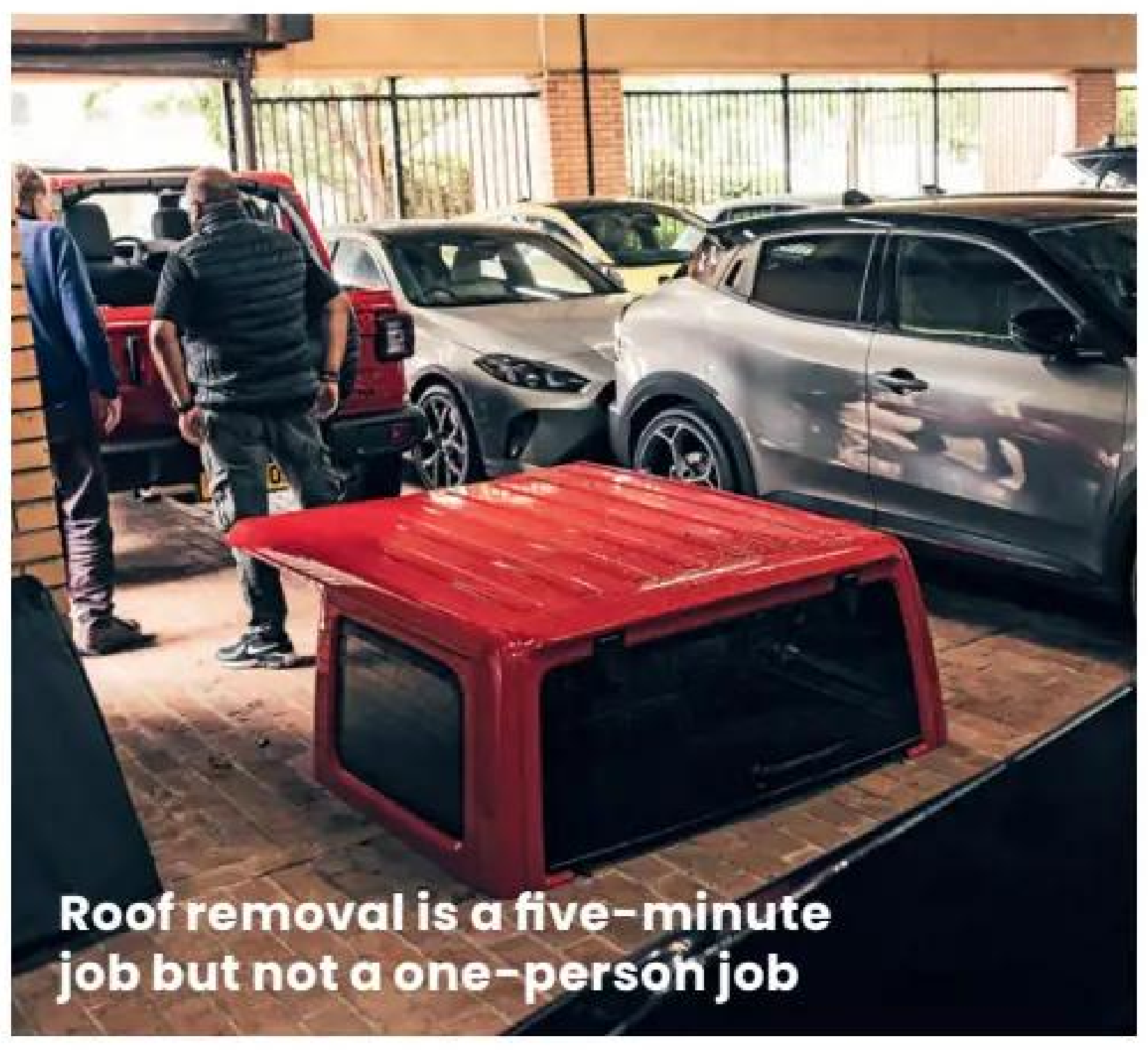
MILEAGE 16,250
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if the quintessential Jeep is really a vehicle you can live with every day

When people talk about elephants in rooms, they are usually referring to some looming threat or fault. However, in the very special case of our Jeep Wrangler Sahara, the elephant refers to a glorious positive. Not only that, it's also an asset that no other Jeep family member can boast, let alone any of the Wrangler's more conventional rivals. The entire roof can be lifted off. All four doors can be removed, too, and the windscreen will fold forwards onto the bonnet, safari-hunter style.

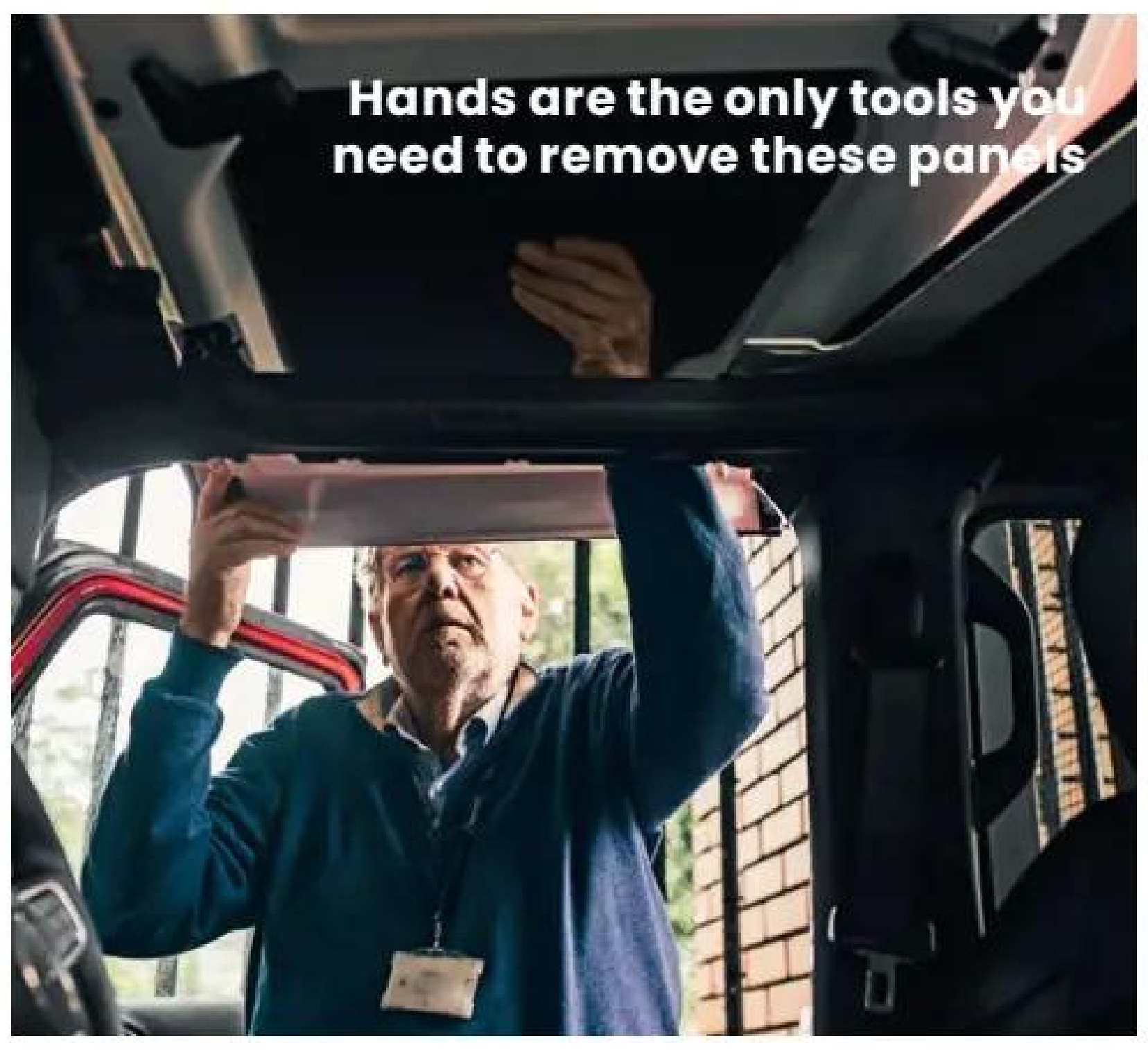
This, along with the robust ride and the general Tonka toughness of every aspect of the Wrangler, is why people so often reckon it's quite similar to a traditional Land Rover Defender but with modern facilities (central touchscreen, adaptive cruise control, ventilation that works), and they're right to do so.

I made that elephant reference because, despite racking up a prodigious mileage during my short ownership, I never quite got around to removing the lid until the last few weeks, partly out of caution (who wants to get halfway through such an operation and find they can't complete it?) and partly because it was pretty obvious that we would need several sets of hands to handle the bulk and weight.

In the end, having heard from Jeep UK PR manager Manesh Taank (one of those blokes who work for car companies who can handle any task) that removal was easy, we persuaded him to come around to the Autocar office and manage the whole operation. Naturally, on the day we chose it was bucketing…


Roof removal is a five-minute job but not a one-person job

Still, Manesh turned out to be quite right about the ease of removal and refitting: it is easy. The lid lifts out in three pieces. There are two smaller composite panels over the driver and front passenger that can be removed on their own and are then stored in a bag you then carry with your luggage. The third is a much larger single piece covering the whole car from B-pillar to rear and including the windows down to waist height. That takes at least two people to lift, and three is better because although it's not heavy, it is quite high off the floor.


Hands are the only tools you need to remove these panels

Without those panels, the Wrangler becomes a different car, although for this exercise we left the doors in place (the car isn't legal on UK roads without them). We did fold the windscreen down briefly, discovering once again that only those who have never driven a car with no windscreen think it's a viable way to travel.

Then, with no roof overhead and all the side windows lowered, I made several forays into the back streets of Twickenham with the rain streaming, Morgan-style, down the inside of the flat windscreen just as much as the outside. It was strictly short-term fun and very damp, but the boom of the engine was more evident and very pleasant, and my promise to try the Wrangler roofless was kept.

The drenching of the interior furnishings had no lasting effect on the Wrangler at all. For one thing, the fascia is partly protected by the windscreen frame above and is nearly vertical, so rain goes straight past and hits seats or carpet. For another, the robust trim materials on the doors, floors and dashboard are obviously specifically chosen to withstand drenching. We cursorily wiped the seats and dials dry, and within an hour the cabin looked just like normal.

I have absolutely no doubt that, were this my own car, it would spend quite a few days of the summer with parts of the roof missing, especially since you can buy soft canopies for these for use when the weather is uncertain. Just that ability, even when not utilised, makes you feel superior to the rest of the serious 4x4 brigade.

Indeed, it's capabilities like this that make the Wrangler feel unique and timeless – a copy of nothing, as another manufacturer might put it. Any owner, even if they have one just for a while, will themselves be hoping the Wrangler will live forever.

STEVE CROPLEY

LOVE IT

PANEL BEATER

Sunny day? You can take the roof and even the doors off your Wrangler, and in a few minutes. No other SUV offers this, kids love it and it's fun for adults as well. The panels easily refit too.

LOATHE IT

PRYING EYES

I do worry about the safety of gear left in the boot. At present, it's open to the gazes of thieves. The big roll bar might complicate fitment, but I still wish there were a convenient cover.

TEST DATA

JEEP WRANGLER 2.0 GME SAHARA

Price new £61,125 **Price as tested** £62,090 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 25.5mpg **Last seen** 28.5.25

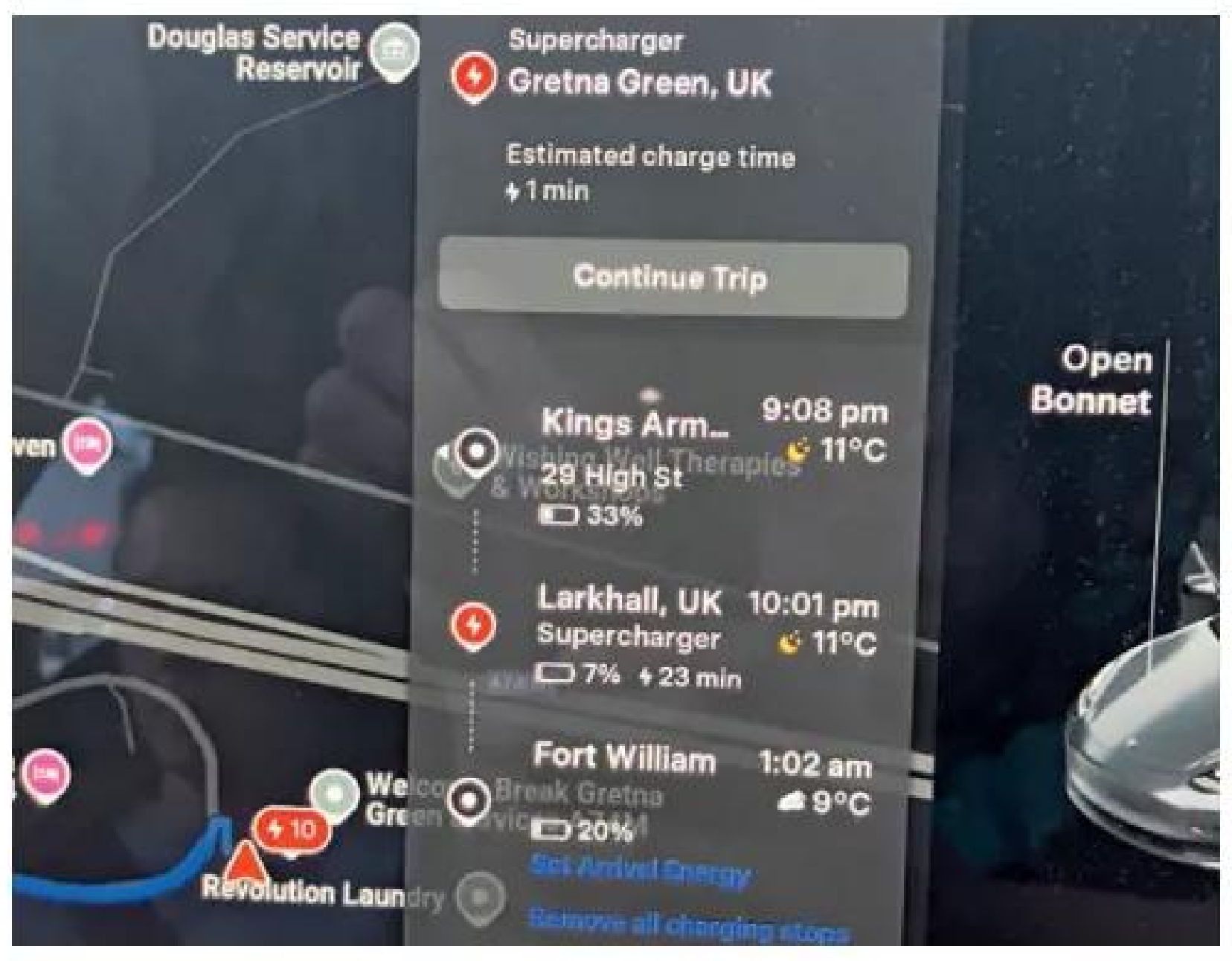
SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

TESLA MODEL 3

An EV road trip to the Highlands sounds dicey. Was it?

MILEAGE 43,845
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if an approved used car is the best route into Tesla ownership

EV driving entails regular short stops; Jeff will never jump into a diesel again
TESLA
LB21 RNJ



EVs are pretty much universally accepted as an ideal solution to the challenges of urban driving, but there remains a stigma around their suitability for long road trips. However, when we saw the cost of a sleeper train while investigating a 20th-wedding-anniversary long weekend to visit friends in Fort William, wife Emma and I decided to entrust our Tesla.

The usual M25 tedium was dispatched fairly quickly, followed by a fairly swift run up the M40/M42 and then the joy of the clear, fast M6 Toll, where we were comfortably the slowest car, keeping just shy of 70mph to conserve energy.

The dreadful tailbacks around Manchester were unpleasant, but once into the Lake District and beyond the roads were just glorious, their sweeping bends perfectly suiting the Model 3. Using the Tesla's sat-nav system on a journey such as this forces you to adapt your way of thinking: instead of the traditional ICE mindset of using a tankful of fuel and then refilling, you set your desired charge level on arrival and it gives you 'splash and dash' stops to keep the charge topped up without forcing you to spend hours waiting each time.

LOVE IT

CANINE COMPANION

If you've a pet with you and need to nip to the shops, Dog Mode is genius: set your temperature, in flows fresh air and a touchscreen message warns busybodies: 'My driver will be back soon.'

LOATHE IT

GETTING IN A SCRAPE

The Model 3 is surprisingly low-slung, so much so that it's impossible to avoid bottoming out with a graunch on more aggressive speed bumps.

Usefully, these pauses tend to be timed perfectly for when you need a break – or in our case when our spaniel does (for which I can highly recommend Charnock services, where there's a pleasant dog walk beside the bank of Superchargers).

We made an overnight stop in Lockerbie, just north of the border, where we encountered a Dutch Model 3 undertaking a far more ambitious journey than ours.

Moving farther north, as we got into the breathtaking scenery and spectacular roads of the Highlands, it was impossible to resist switching the car's Dynamic mode from Chill to Standard to gain access to the outrageous full-bore acceleration that was able to dispatch the seemingly endless trains of motorhomes safely and with ease.

The stretch through Glen Coe was magical as ever. It was just a shame that the driving experience wasn't more interactive, as the Model 3's lack of communication prevented it creating a proper bond with me.

Nevertheless, it delivered us to Fort William refreshed and relaxed, and it did the same on the near-600-mile schlep home again, despite encountering terrible traffic on a sweltering bank holiday Monday.

It's refined (bar quite a bit of road noise), comfortable in spite of the firm ride and relaxing, and it managed an impressive 3.9mpkWh despite the climate control being on for the majority of the trip.

Above all, the trip was far easier than we expected, and a big part of that is thanks to Tesla's remarkable charging network. So many times in previous EVs I've arrived at chargers to find them all occupied, broken or reluctant to communicate with my car. But there are now more than 1800 ultra-rapid Tesla Supercharger stalls at 160-plus locations across the UK, which are fast, plentiful and cheaper than most rivals – and, in the case of the Fort William station, pretty scenic as you sit and charge in the shadow of Ben Nevis.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

TEST DATA

TESLA MODEL 3 LONG RANGE ALL-WHEEL DRIVE

Price new £49,935 (in 2021) **Price as tested** £28,000 **Faults** Tyre pressure sensor failure **Expenses** Tyres £720, wipers £55 **Range** 285 miles **Economy** 3.9mpkWh **Last seen** 4.6.25

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alastair.clements@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

CUPRA LEON ESTATE

Mileage 8256 **Last seen** 11.6.25
Oh dear: I've been a wally. I complained recently that this latest Leon had no physical boot release button, forcing me to use the button on the key to pop it open. I've since had a few owners advise me that there is indeed a button; it's hidden under the offside brake light. In my defence, I'd challenged no fewer than seven people to find it over the past few months and none had prevailed. **FP**

BMW 1 SERIES

Mileage 4119 **Last seen** 18.6.25
Many cars these days feature a 'panoramic roof', and those are great, but it's a pity that proper opening sunroofs have become rare. You can add one to your 1 Series for £1050, and I sure would because I'm loving driving with nothing but a blue sky above me in this warmer weather. A pop-up net deflector keeps wind noise bearable up to around 40mph. It came in handy when we went hunting for a good view of the recent strawberry moon, too. **KC**

MINI ACEMAN

Mileage 1746 **Last seen** 11.6.25
I'm doing some home renovation at the moment, and over a recent weekend my Aceman E achieved more than 5.0mpkWh during short journeys to B&Q, the tip, an industrial complex, Asda, B&Q again and then a different B&Q. Even though I'm having to pay 48p per kWh for on-street charging, that works out at less than 10p per mile. **MSc**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A

BMW X1

THIS ONE'S A KEEPER

BMW's smallest crossover really came of age in its second generation

The original BMW X1 racked up more than 700,000 global sales between 2009 and 2015, but for all its success it was plainly styled, poorly packaged and flawed on the road. Happily, the Mk2 car of 2015 to 2022 fixed all of that, and it holds up today as a great-value family hauler with up-to-date technology and real kerb appeal.

Prices start at about £5000 for cars with more than 100,000 miles under their wheels, but with a budget of around £8500 you can easily find a clean and well-equipped example that will have the neighbours' curtains twitching.

You might think it a relatively staid, front-driven family SUV, but the X1 is a surprisingly good car to drive, cleverly hiding the extra bulk and height it has over a normal family hatchback. Its steering is precise and communicative, it maintains good body control and it generally inspires confidence when you thread it down a rural road. Sure, it's not as engaging as some of BMW's rear-driven offerings, but it's pleasant nonetheless and reasonably comfortable.

If you're after a bit more ride quality, look for the optional adaptive dampers, which add an extra layer of comfort. The alternative is to go for an entry-level SE car with the smallest (17in) wheels and comfort suspension. And even SE trim is well equipped, with BMW's iDrive infotainment system, a powered tailgate and rear parking sensors all included.

A tidy 60,000-miler will cost about £10,000. You will need at least £2000 more for a car in M Sport trim, with

Cabin has an old-school BMW look and feel – and is all the better for it

What we said then

14 OCTOBER 2015

"Owners of the previous X1 simply won't recognise the spacious, flexible, classy customer they've taken delivery of here – and refugees from other crossover models will have plenty to say in praise of the car's practicality, quality and handsomeness."

its bodykit and firmer suspension.

Sport and xLine trims offer the best value for money. The latter adds leather seats and LED headlights, and looks classy with its chrome exterior trim.

That said, all versions feel solid and refined inside: the plastics on the doors and by your feet are solid, while the aluminium brightwork on the dash exudes an upmarket feel.

You sit nice and high in the front and there's plenty of head and leg room in the back, too.

Make sure you find a car fitted with a sliding rear bench: it adds an extra layer of flexibility to the cabin and allows you to increase the boot capacity should you need it. That said, the 505-litre boot is good for its class and is large enough for a buggy, golf clubs or a few suitcases.

There's a good mix of 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engines to choose from. The front-wheel-drive sDrive18d diesel is ideal for daily duties, and you can expect around 50mpg. You can get the same oil-burner with four-wheel drive should you need the extra pulling power, but for towing a caravan or trailer we would opt for the 187bhp xDrive20d. It has a bit more poke yet is just as efficient. Some will be drawn to the 228bhp xDrive25d: while it's a bit firm-riding, it blends impressive performance with decent economy.

There's also the 1.5-litre three-cylinder sDrive18i petrol engine borrowed from the Mini hatchback. It's by no means quick, but you will easily get 40-45mpg out of it.

Petrol options are that 138bhp sDrive18i or the sprightly 189bhp 20i, which can be had in front- or four-wheel-drive form.

A mild facelift in 2019 brought tweaks to the exterior and interior, while the 217bhp plug-in hybrid xDrive25e with an electric-only range of 35 miles joined the line-up.

PHEVs are a bit dearer than regular petrols and diesels, but whichever engine or trim you go for, a Mk2 X1 is money well spent.

SAM PHILLIPS

You can't slide an X1 like an M3, but it's far from lame on a good road

> **"It's surprisingly good to drive, cleverly hiding its extra bulk and height. It inspires confidence"**

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

IAN DAVID

"I bought my X1 xDrive20d in April 2021, and so far it has proved to be a reliable and capable family car. It was the ideal replacement for an X3 that we had run for several years. While it is a bit firm-riding, the X1 is nice to drive, and I like the raised seating position. It's very efficient, too, and will do more than 55mpg on the motorway. I did have to pay £320 for a new battery for the SOS emergency function, because it wasn't covered under warranty, but aside from that it has been very reliable and decent to live with."

BUYER BEWARE…

■ ENGINE

A clogged diesel particulate filter isn't uncommon if a diesel car isn't driven long distances, because regeneration is activated at motorway speeds.

Reduced performance could spell problems with the crankshaft sensor. Helpfully, BMW will replace this for you if your car is affected.

The passenger-side engine mount can crack. If you hear any strange noises or feel extra vibrations, getting this replaced should alleviate the issue.

■ ELECTRICS

Watch for DAB radio, sat-nav and whole infotainment system failures. A broken control module or faulty wiring can knock them out. Software updates can assuage the problem.

■ BRAKES

Discs and pads are known to wear more quickly on 4x4s, so check their condition and ask for them to be replaced as part of the deal if they're on their way out.

■ SUSPENSION

Bushes and suspension arms can wear prematurely, so listen out for knocks on a test drive.

■ GEARBOX

It's not uncommon for the gearbox to jump out of gear; this is generally more of an issue with manual X1s. If this happens on a test drive, walk away. Also listen out for a rattling noise from the dash at higher speeds or when accelerating, as this can also spell trouble for the gearbox.

■ WHEELS

Check for scuffs and make sure that cars fitted with diamond-cut alloys aren't suffering from the dreaded white worm.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

X1s came fitted with run-flat tyres, which are noisier than conventional tyres and can make the ride less comfortable. Consider buying a new set if you want a bit more comfort; Continental and Dunlop offer good alternatives.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£4500-£8999

Lots of high-mileage sDrive18d and xDrive18d diesels, mostly in SE trim. A handful of Sport, xLine and M Sport cars.

£9000-£13,999

A broad mix of engines and trims, but you will probably end up in a 18d or 20d xLine model, as these are the most common. Lots of tidy cars with a full service history and one previous owner.

£14,000-£17,999

Plenty of 1.5-litre 18i and 2.0-litre 20i petrol examples. Mileage varies but generally these are newer cars in good condition.

£18,000-£22,999

Post-facelift cars in excellent condition. Predominantly 2.0-litre petrols but some low-mileage plug-in hybrids are available.

£23,000 AND ABOVE

Nearly new cars in immaculate condition. Dealer sales only.

ONE WE FOUND

BMW X1 xDRIVE20D xLINE AUTO, 2017, 70,000 MILES, £11,489

There are plenty more school runs and family holidays to be had in this immaculate 2.0-litre diesel X1, which has had only one keeper. Being an xLine, it's loaded with kit, like heated seats, xenon headlights and a Harman Kardon stereo. It has a long MOT and a full service history to boot.

My car & I

A Ferrari-inspired BMW fit for a king

KOENIG
KOENIG

This 1986 BMW 635 CSi is one of four BMWs worked on by German tuning and modification legend Willy König that Tahmid Haque owns.

The others include a 1990 850i with a supercharger and, says Tahmid, a massive spoiler on the back: "It was originally owned by a Polish gangster. There's a Netflix documentary about him. He was shot dead in a nightclub, but his wife says she has fond memories of the car..." Then there's a 1991 M5, one of just four in existence, and Tahmid's most recent acquisition, a 1989 750i V12 that he bought in Denmark and which is being fully restored in Poland.

All four are part of Tahmid's wider collection, currently numbering 30 cars. Not bad for a 27-year-old.

However, it's the 635 CSi he's brought to his local car meet – and what an eyeful it is. Viewed from an angle, there's more than a hint of 1980s Ferrari Testarossa about it.

"That's deliberate," says Tahmid. "[König's firm] Koenig was known for restyling Ferraris to the extent that Ferrari ordered it to remove its prancing horse badges from a car that he had modified. König's love of Ferraris extended to imitating their styling in his

Our cars

A new engine for my Imp – but first a new chicken run

BY MATT PRIOR

Many, many months ago, I had basically decided to sell my Hillman Imp, because I was hardly using it and was short of time and space to look after it. So naturally when I recently saw in an owners' club for modified Imps that a BMW K1100LT motorbike engine was available locally, I bought that immediately.

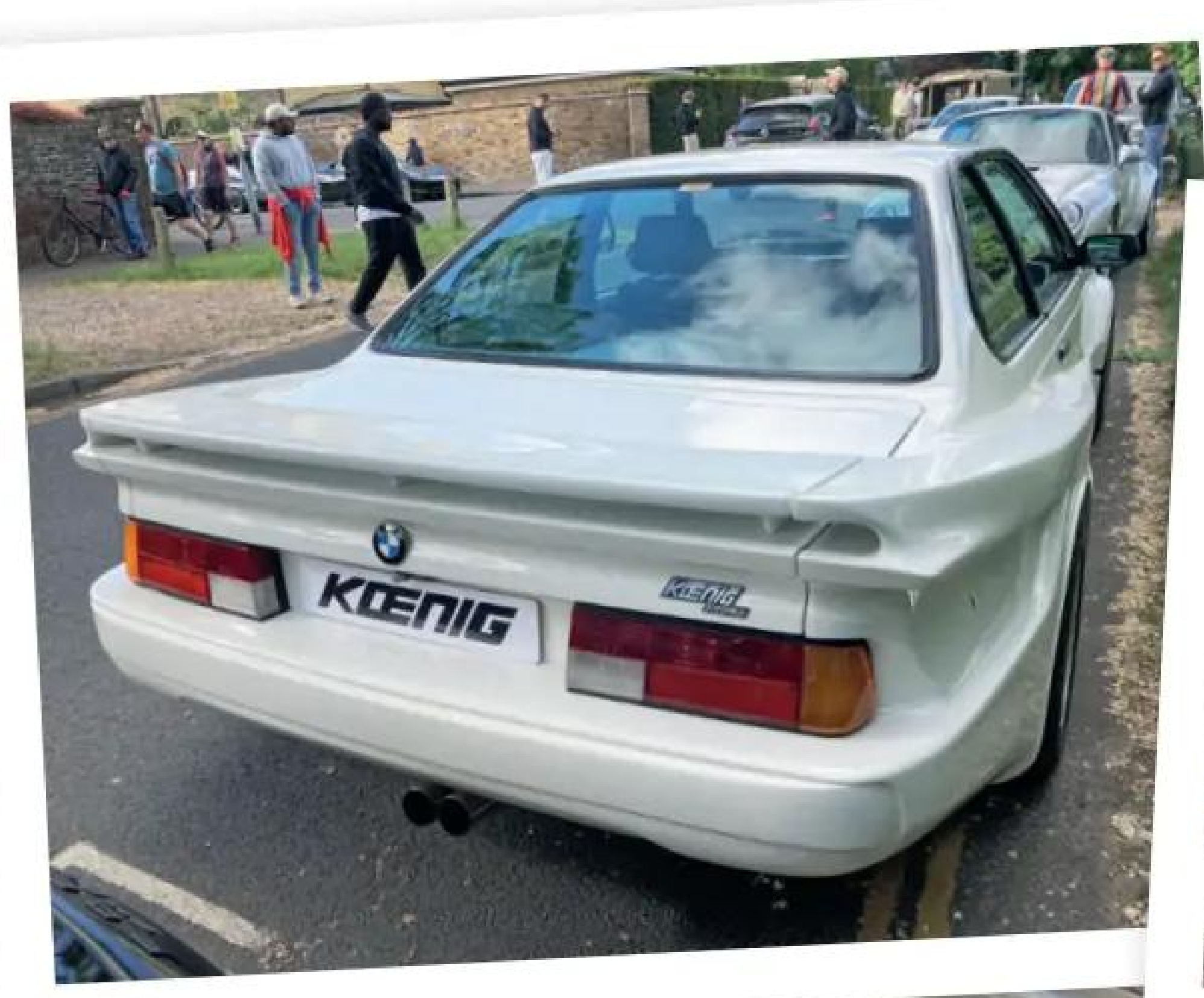
An inline four-cylinder BMW engine conversion is popular for Imps, because the cylinders run horizontally, leaving it so compact that it fits into the Imp's (rear) engine bay without modifying the chassis. Gearbox bell housings are modified to suit and it makes a good amount of extra power without blowing the clutch or 'box.

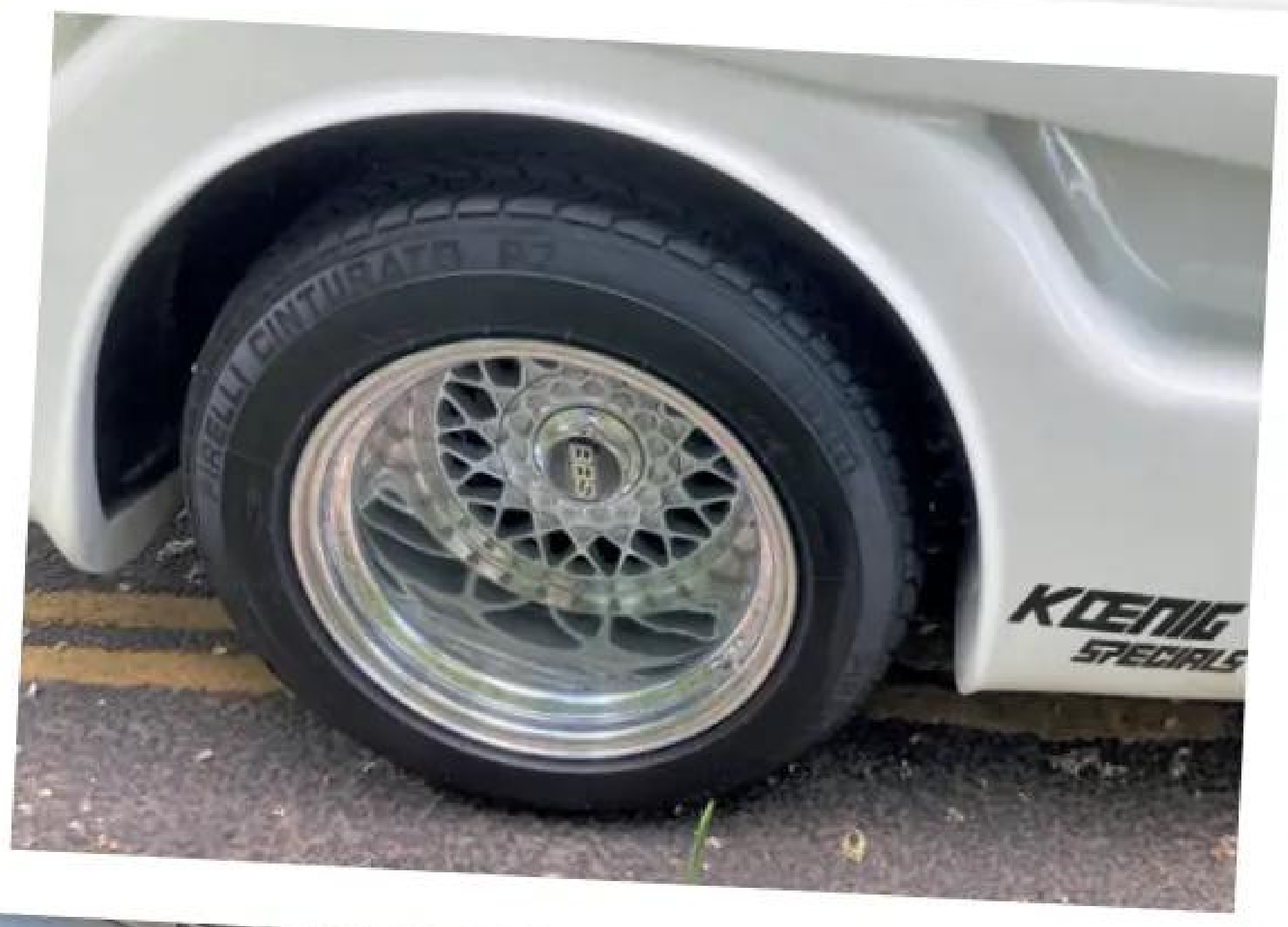
A 1999 K1100LT that at some point donated this engine developed 100bhp at 7500rpm and 79lb ft of torque at 5500rpm, with a response and sound, modified Imp owners say, very similar to the standard engine but clearly with much more acceleration. A Mk1 Imp engine like mine made less than 40bhp new.

Prior is planning to more than double his Imp's power

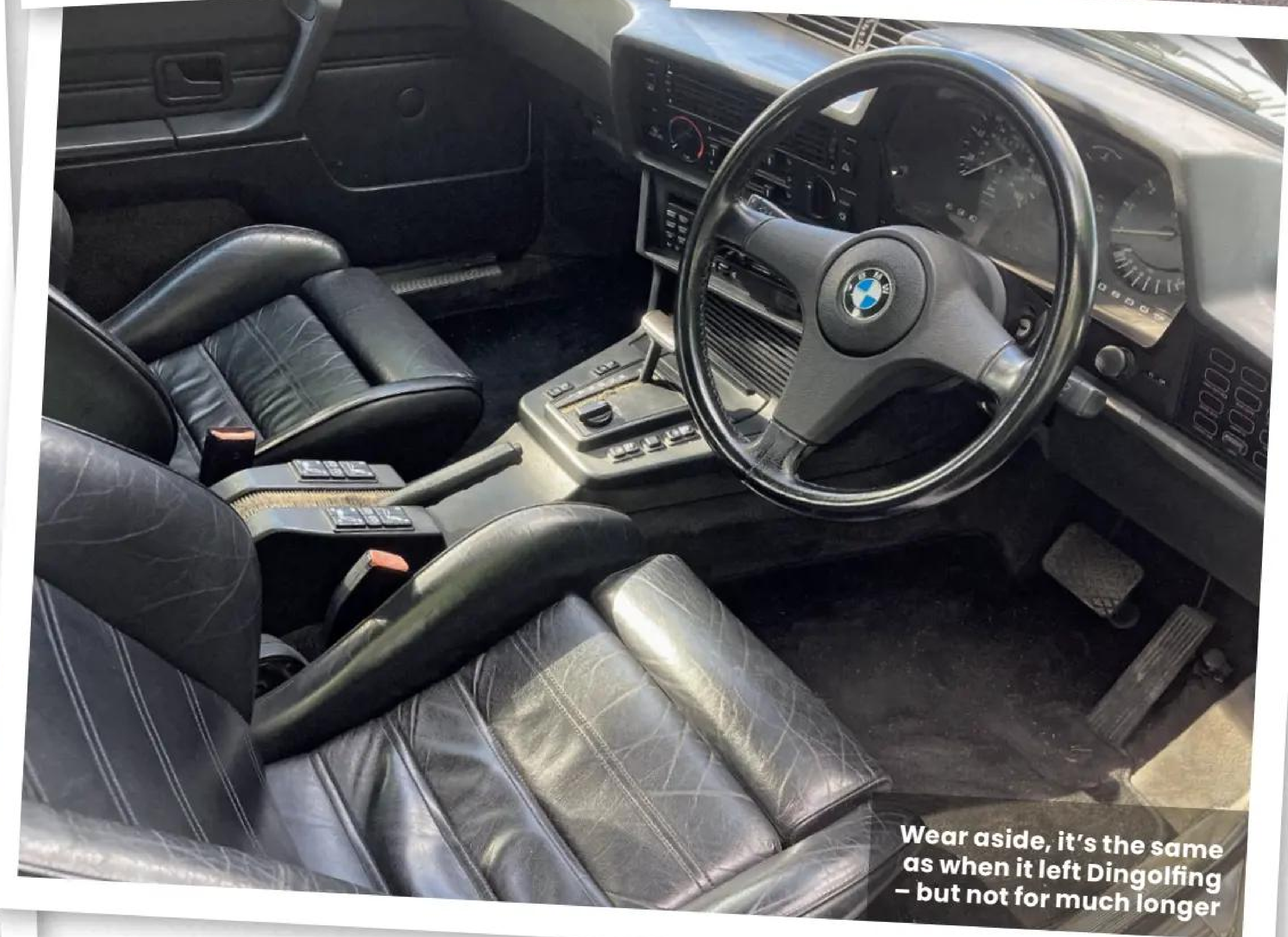
I should now have most of what I need: the engine, gearbox, clutch and a box of ancillaries. The previous owner has since found the wiring loom, so I'll pick that up soon. It will need an exhaust.

I haven't started work yet but have started making space for doing so. That requires making a new chicken run, and I seem to have committed to building a new greenhouse too. So it will be a while, but I'm in no rush.





Testarossa influenced swooping side lines; BBS wheels evoke Countach



Wear aside, it's the same as when it left Dingolfing – but not for much longer

> **"It sits a bit lower than regular 635s, but that may just be the extra weight of the kit!"**

bodykits for other makes."

Tahmid's 635 is one of only two modified by Koenig Specials, the other being a left-hand-drive car in black that was the company's publicity vehicle. The white right-hooker was sold to a retail customer who, on top of the car's list price, paid £50,000 for it.

"It's really just a bodykit, although a high-quality one that fits perfectly," says Tahmid. "The interior is unchanged. The exhaust is non-standard and sounds amazing, but I don't know whether that was a Koenig mod. The wheels are as a wide as those on a Lamborghini Countach. The car sits a bit lower than regular 635s, but that may just be the extra weight of the kit!"

Tahmid first saw the car eight years ago at the London Motor Museum. When that closed in 2018, much of the collection, including the 635, went into storage. Eventually it was offered for sale and, despite its non-running condition, Tahmid pounced.

"The brakes had seized, part of the manifold was missing, the exhaust was hanging and the cooling system needed work," he recalls. "I spent £12,000 recommissioning it."

Tahmid is coy about what he paid for the car, which has done only 62,000 miles, but does say that he paid less than the £86,000 its black sister car sold for four years ago.

Whatever he parted with, it has been a good investment. Last year at the Classic Motor Show in Birmingham, it bagged the award of third-favourite car. "Wherever it goes it turns heads, and that was a really cool accolade," he says.

His future plans include fixing a little bit of corrosion and fitting a fresh interior: "I've already got new Recaro Classic seats and a full leather dash for it. With a bold colour, it will look fantastic."

What with the work he's had done making the 635 roadworthy, Tahmid has driven only 2000 miles in the car, but he intends to do many more. "It's a keeper," he says. "I also have an original M635 CSi, so to have that and the Koenig Specials 635 is really good."

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

CHARLIE MARTIN

2013 MINI COUPE COOPER SD

VS

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

2017 ALFA ROMEO GIULIA 2.2 JTDM SPECIALE

Brief: Find an interesting car that costs only £35 to tax annually

AW Okay, so I've chosen something that's twice the price of your £5190 Mini, but this £11,490 top-spec Alfa is clearly twice the car. More than twice the seats, more engine, more power and, I can guarantee, more appreciative looks.

CM Granted, the Giulia is a stunner, but that clattery old donkey under its bonnet betrays everything else that's great about it. Don't forget that our goal is to get something interesting, and this Mini does exactly that with its backwards-cap styling and cute proportions.

AW Mmm, but the Mini Coupé is interesting for all the wrong reasons. Just get yourself a hatch: it's prettier and roomier. Still suffers from the catastrophic timing chain issues of the N47, though. My Alfa's engine may not be a Busso V6, but it ain't half bad for a diesel four.

CM Practicality is antithetical to excitement. That's like comparing Ikea instructions to Salvador Dalí or Madness to Aphex Twin. The weird and the slightly naff is just better.

AW Each to their own, I suppose, and I have to admit your Mini is wearing a fabulous colour. But even so, I can't be convinced that a diesel engine in a little Mini is a fun idea, whereas it makes perfect sense in a mile-munching saloon. I wonder if they do a good trade-in price...

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

MERCEDES-BENZ CL 500
2009, 72,000 miles, £13,695
A 5.5-litre V8 CL cost near £100k new, but now you can buy this one for £14k. You will do well to find a CL in better nick, too: it has a full service history, just had a gearbox service by a specialist and is MOTed until next January.

JAGUAR XJS 4.0 CELEBRATION
1996, 47,000 miles, £17,995
This XJS is a GT that's as refined and upmarket as most modern alternatives. This limited edition has a huge history file from its two previous owners and is said to have been "exceptionally well maintained". Jag's AJ 4.0-litre straight six was a peach, too.

PORSCHE 928 GT
1990, 109,000 miles, £29,000
One of just 225 manual GTs made, this 928 is in decent nick for a sports car that has done over 100,000 miles. Sure, it has a few marks and minor bubbling and it needs some mechanical issues to be resolved to make it perfect, but we would still buy it for that burbling V8.

AUDI S5 COUPE
2011, 43,000 miles, £12,490
A 4.2-litre V8 Audi coupé with a low mileage for £13k? Value for money doesn't get much better. This tidy S5 has a full service history and a stunning red leather interior, plus desirable extras such as a panoramic roof and damper control.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

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ARNOTT
RACING CARS

The car company founded by a woman

The subject of last week's My Car and I article, Duncan Rabagliati, was full of interesting recollections and titbits. Perhaps the most intriguing was about Arnott, "the only car company to be created and owned by a woman".

Daphne Arnott's eponymous company lasted for only a decade or so, but its short existence was an exciting and noteworthy one – and not just because of gender norms.

Arnott was born in 1926 to a father who was a third-generation automotive engineer and she was first exposed to motorsport at a young age, when he took her to Brooklands to watch a customer race using a supercharger of his.

She joined the London-based family business after a magazine publishing venture failed and became friendly with its general manager, wartime aircraft engineer George Thornton.

In 1951, the pair ventured to build a car for Formula 3, a new category for single-seaters powered by 500cc motorbike engines that had arisen from post-war austerity in Britain.

Autocar took notice when the little Arnott 500 "proved very fast" on its debut at Brands Hatch that October. It had independent suspension, partly donated by a Morris Minor, but most notable was Arnott's focus on safety: it was the first F3 car with an integrated roll hoop and a seatbelt – not common even in Formula 1 for another 20 years.

When our sister title Classic & Sports Car caught up with Arnott in later years, she recalled: "Anyone who drove for the works team was required to use belts. Nobody was ever killed in one of our cars, and Dennis Taylor perhaps owes his life to our belts. He rolled a car at Brands Hatch but stayed in it, and when it landed on all four wheels, he continued. Had he been thrown out, he could have been seriously hurt."

Arnott had wanted to try racing herself but "at the time there were so many restrictions on women and I wanted to compete on equal terms with the men. Most of those ladies' races were really for the girlfriends of drivers and mechanics, and I thought they were a bit sissy."

Arnott entered a bespoke gullwing coupé into 1957 Le Mans race

1953 streamliner still holds some 500cc records even now

Naturally, her exploits caught the attention of London's press. The Evening News wrote in 1952: "Arnott is a real mechanic. She is frequently to be seen in the pits changing a plug or helping in some other way, her white overalls grimy with grease, her blackened hands pushing carelessly through her blonde curls." When asked if she had a romantic link to driver John Brise, she pointed to her car with a grin and said: "This is my boyfriend, and he takes up all my spare time."

The paper met her again in 1953, as her team fielded another F3 first: a fibreglass body. It weighed a third as much as an aluminium one, and she emphasised: "We kicked it around the garage and jumped on it and it seemed to make no difference."

Meanwhile, Arnott had an eye on record-breaking, as DB, Kieft and Cooper set new 500cc bests at Montlhéry in quick order. So her team fabricated a streamlined body for the F3 car – and Brise broke no fewer than nine class records, for a fastest lap (122mph) and endurance.

Next came a road-going sports car: basically the F3 chassis clad in a fibreglass coupé body (praised by Autocar as "striking and beautifully finished") and powered by various British fours. At least six were sold.

Ever ambitious, Arnott decided to enter a car into the 1955 Le Mans 24 Hours (painted not British racing green but her favourite colour, red).

The only available driver was young Peter Taylor, and Arnott later recalled: "As he passed the pits [during practice], he simply had to give his girlfriend a nonchalant wave. That loss of concentration caused him to clip something, the car swerved across the track and piled into the Dunlop Bridge. He was unhurt, but when I saw him get out of the car unscathed, I wanted to run across and murder him."

It was a major blow, but Arnott's team redoubled their efforts for a 1957 return with a bespoke coupé – and this time the innovation was, in our words, "quite the most complex suspension", the idea being that long rocker arms would afford more grip the faster the car was cornered.

It ran okay in the race – until the fifth hour, when its Climax engine uncharacteristically shed a valve.

And that was pretty much that. Arnott refocused on the family business, taking it over after her father died in 1961. Soon after she sold up and moved to Devon to run a guest house with her husband. She took the 1955 Le Mans car with her, though – it was this that Rabagliati later had restored.

KRIS CULMER

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

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Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant ★★★★☆	14.2.18	A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

Flying Spur Speed First Edition
★★★★☆ 21.5.25
Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.
3.2 2.7 2750 26.7 44

BMW

120 M Sport ★★★½☆ 31.12.24
Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.
7.3 6.8 1489 45.8 -

218i M Sport Gran Coupé
★★★☆☆ 8.4.20
Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.
8.8 8.4 1375 58.2 -

220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆ 1.6.22
A good coupé rather than a great sports car.
7.3 7.3 1546 46.8 -

M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★½ 12.7.23
Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.
4.5 3.8 1687 32.1 -

320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★ 15.5.19
BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.
6.9 6.8 1639 63.3 -

330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★½ 15.1.20
An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.
5.5 5.2 1922 52.6 -

330e M Sport ★★★★½ 1.7.20
Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.
- - 1740 - -

M440i xDrive ★★★★☆ 6.1.21
A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.
4.1 3.7 1775 44.0 -

M4 Competition ★★★★½ 21.4.21
A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.
3.9 2.9 1800 32.7 -

M4 CS ★★★★☆ 23.4.25
Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.
2.9 2.5 1747 32.4 -

i4 M50 ★★★★☆ 19.1.22
Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.
4.1 3.2 2248 - 186

M4 CSL ★★★★☆ 16.11.22
A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.
3.6 2.7 1625 31.1 -

M5 ★★★½☆ 29.1.25
A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.
3.5 2.8 2373 27.3 35

i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★½☆ 29.11.23
Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.
5.4 4.4 2213 - 235

550e xDrive M Sport Pro
★★★★☆ 3.4.24
Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.
4.4 3.5 2232 40.1 47

i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★½ 15.2.23
It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.
4.5 3.4 2758 - 264

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

840d xDrive ★★★★☆ 16.1.19
A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.
5.0 4.6 1901 49.2 -

M8 Competition Convertible
★★★½☆ 5.2.20
Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.
3.3 2.7 2020 31.6 -

M8 Competition ★★★½☆ 3.6.20
Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.
- - 1960 - -

X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★½☆ 25.1.23
A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.
6.4 6.0 1800 45.6 -

X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 13.11.19
Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.
4.0 3.3 2028 29.0 -

X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆ 2.1.19
Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.
6.6 6.6 2279 43.1 -

X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 20.3.24
Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.
3.5 3.1 2442 29.3 -

X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆ 29.3.23
Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.
4.2 3.7 2600 28.9 -

iX xDrive50 M Sport ★★★★½ 2.3.22
Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.
4.4 3.4 2593 - 252

Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack
★★★★☆ 21.8.24
Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.
5.7 5.9 1561 36.9 -

BMW ALPINA

B3 GT Touring ★★★★½ 15.1.25
Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.
3.3 2.7 1910 29.4 -

B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆ 22.9.21
Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.
3.5 2.8 2100 - -

BYD

Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆ 31.5.23
Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.
7.0 6.2 1787 - 201

Seal Design ★★★½☆ 17.1.24
Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.
5.8 4.7 2116 - 279

CATERHAM

Seven 160 ★★★★☆ 20.11.13
Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.
8.4 8.7 510 44.8 -

Seven 620S ★★★★½ 9.3.16
Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.
3.8 4.2 650 29.5 -

Seven 420 Cup ★★★★½ 31.8.22
Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.
4.2 3.4 560 35.3 -

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

CHEVROLET

Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆ 22.6.22
Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.
3.9 3.2 1679 32.9 -

Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆ 16.8.23
Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.
3.1 2.4 1670 26.1 -

CITROEN

Ami Colour ★★½☆☆ 11.1.23
Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.
- - 471 - 39

ë-C3 Max ★★★½☆ 30.4.25
Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.
10.7 10.3 1479 2.8 -

C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair
★★★½☆ 7.3.18
Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.
11.5 10.7 1159 39.5 -

C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto
★★★☆☆ 26.5.21
Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.
9.5 9.2 1320 56.4 -

ë-C4 X Shine ★★★½☆ 3.5.23
EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.
9.7 8.8 1623 - 162

C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus
★★★½☆ 13.2.19
Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.
9.0 8.5 1540 47.8 -

C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus
★★★★☆ 28.9.22
Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.
7.8 7.1 1502 47.8 -

CUPRA

Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★½☆ 6.7.22
As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.
6.7 6.2 1794 - 220

Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆ 9.10.24
An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.
5.4 4.2 1996 3.5 269

Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆ 8.9.21
Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.
4.9 4.3 1707 40.1 -

Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆ 27.7.22
Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.
5.9 4.7 1468 43.4 -

Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★½☆ 23.1.19
Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.
4.9 4.4 1615 36.7 -

Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG
★★★★½ 3.2.21
Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.
5.1 4.3 1583 36.4 -

Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2
★★★★☆ 18.6.25
Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.
5.6 5.1 1737 35.0 -

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

Tavascan V1 ★★★☆☆ 5.2.25
Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.
6.0 5.0 2129 3.2 246

DACIA

Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige
★★★★☆ 28.4.21
Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.
11.9 11.9 1096 54.1 -

Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★½ 20.4.22
Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.
11.0 11.0 1267 48.5 -

Duster Hybrid 140 Journey
★★★★½ 27.11.24
Notably improved yet barely any pricier.
9.7 8.7 1413 40.2 -

Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey
★★★★☆ 11.6.25
Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.
8.9 7.8 - 47.5 -

DS

3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige
★★★☆☆ 10.7.19
No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.
8.8 8.3 1205 48.6 -

4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+
★★★½☆ 29.6.22
High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.
7.4 6.0 1706 44.7 26

7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige
★★★½☆ 19.9.18
DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.
8.6 7.0 1616 44.6 -

7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première
★★★½☆ 26.4.23
More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.
5.7 4.6 1956 36.6 29

9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus
★★★½☆ 2.2.22
Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.
8.6 7.1 1886 44.7 20

FERRARI

296 GTB ★★★★★ 21.12.22
Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.
2.7 1.9 1648 37.8 15

SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ 3.11.21
Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.
2.5 1.8 1698 24.4 16

FIAT

500 Twinair Lounge ★★★½☆ 24.11.10
Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.
11.7 13.0 1070 42.1 -

500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆ 26.1.22
More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.
8.1 7.7 1365 - 142

600e La Prima ★★★½☆ 27.3.24
Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.
8.8 7.7 1587 - 173

FORD

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★½	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★½	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma Gen-E Select	★★★★☆	4.6.25	Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.	7.2	7.2	-	3.4	179
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★½☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★½☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★½☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★½☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★½	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-

GENESIS

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★½☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★½☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★½☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★½☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★½☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★½☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT	★★★★½	25.10.17	Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★½☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★½☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★½	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE	★★★½☆	13.9.17	Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance	★★★½☆	28.12.17	Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★½☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★½☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★½☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAECOO

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury	★★½☆☆	9.4.25	Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport	★★★★½	1.7.15	Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD	★★★½☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE	★★★½☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S	★★★★½	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR	★★★★½	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé	★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★½☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-
Torres 1.5T K40 AWD	★★½☆☆	4.6.25	Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.	11.3	12.0	1661	35.0	-

KIA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★½☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-

TOP 3

CHEAPEST CARS TO INSURE

1 Skoda Fabia

2 Seat Ibiza

3 Dacia Sandero

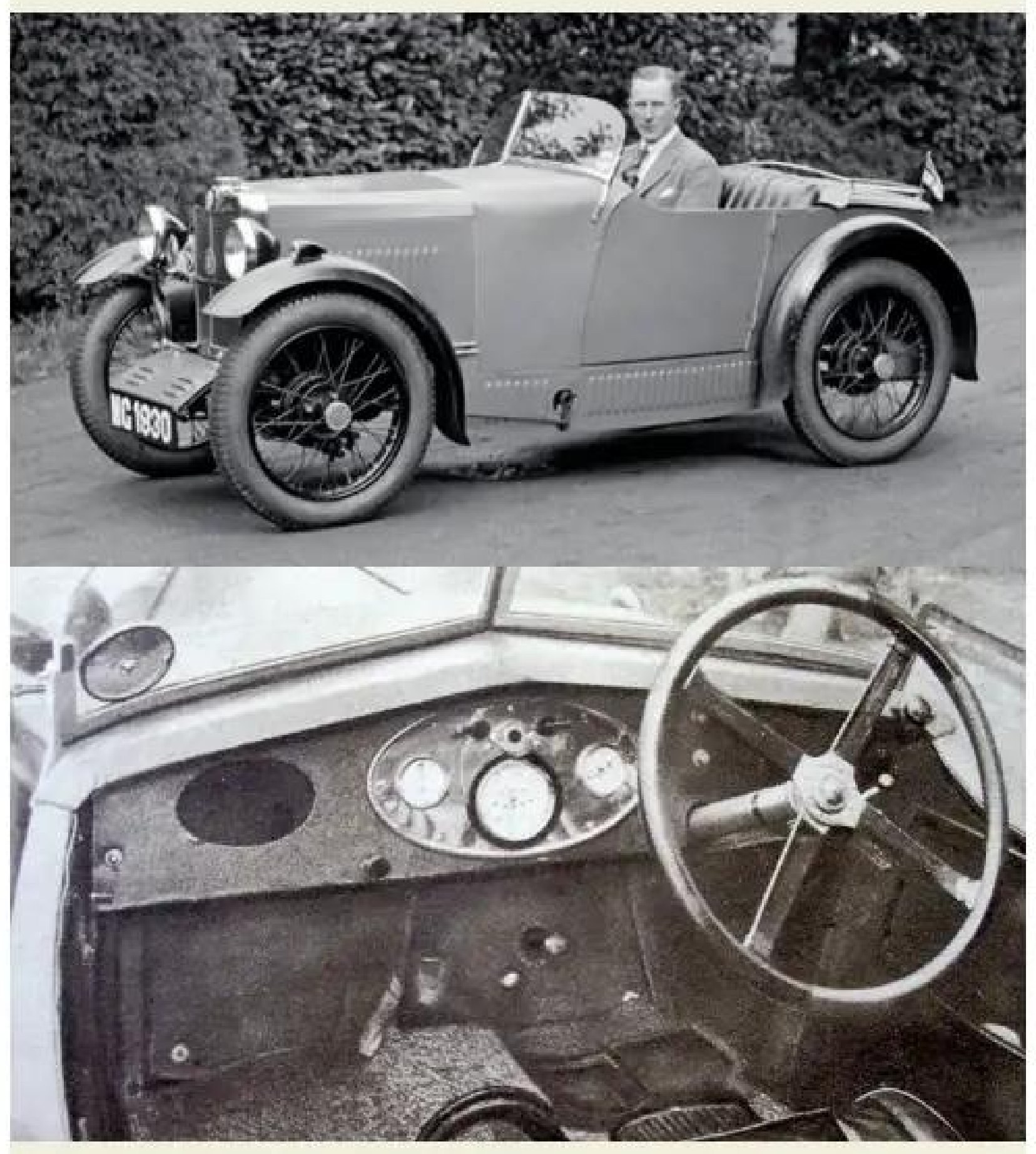
SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1993 JAGUAR XJ220

Limited-edition, TWR-built Jag supercar with motorsport V6 has "unrivalled chassis ability and blinding performance and is surprisingly easy to drive". Very expensive but is "the most accomplished supercar ever made".

Price £403,000
Engine V6, 3500cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power 542bhp at 7200rpm
Torque 475lb ft at 4500rpm
Weight 1456kg
0-60mph 3.6sec
0-150mph 17.4sec
Top speed 213mph
Economy 13.8mpg



1929 MG MIDGET

Morris's performance division creates an affordable sports car that "goes so exceedingly well". The M-Type "sits down on the road like a thoroughbred and at high speeds feels more like a big car than a little one. Altogether it is an extraordinarily fascinating little car, both to look at and handle on the road."

Price £175
Engine 4 cyls in line, 847cc, petrol
Power 20bhp at 4000rpm (est)
Torque na
Weight 508kg
10-30mph 7sec
0-60mph 45sec (est)
Top speed 60mph (est)
Economy 38mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★½☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT	★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

GETTY IMAGES

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
750S ★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura ★★★★½	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider ★★★★½	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT ★★★½☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	
MERCEDES-AMG							
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★½	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate ★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé ★★★★½	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé ★★★½☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition ★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition ★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé ★★★½☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-
MERCEDES-BENZ							
A200 AMG Line Executive ★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium ★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport ★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line ★★★★½	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus ★★★★½	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class ★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV ★★★½☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★½	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49
MG							
3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★½☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive ★★★½☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-
MINI							
John Cooper Works ★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive ★★★½☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive ★★★½☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162
MORGAN							
Plus Four ★★★½☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six ★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3 ★★★★½	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-
NISSAN							
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★½☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna ★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★½☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna ★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-
OMODA							
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort ★★½☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-
PEUGEOT							
e-208 Allure Premium ★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto ★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8 ★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE ★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST ESTATE CARS

1 Skoda Superb Estate

2 Volkswagen ID 7 Tourer

3 BMW 3 Series Touring

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-2008 GT Line ★★★⯪☆ 30.9.20 Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line ★★★⯪☆ 18.1.17 In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★⯪☆ 4.8.24 Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ 12.2.25 Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270 ★★★⯪☆ 12.4.23 A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 12.2.25 Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

PORSCHE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster ★★★★⯪ 8.6.16 Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S ★★★★⯪ 10.8.16 Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder ★★★★⯪ 1.4.20 Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22 A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 GT3 PDK ★★★★⯪ 11.8.21 Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S ★★★★⯪ 10.8.22 Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23 Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS ★★★★⯪ 22.11.23 Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24 Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24 Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
911 Carrera GTS ★★★★⯪ 5.3.25 Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
Macan Turbo ★★★★⯪ 4.6.14 Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric ★★★⯪☆ 19.2.25 Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S ★★★★⯪ 21.2.24 Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18 As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid ★★★⯪☆ 27.5.20 Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé ★★★★☆ 20.7.22 Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ 22.1.25 Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S ★★★★⯪ 30.10.24 Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

RENAULT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★⯪ 27.11.19 Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★⯪ 12.3.25 Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★⯪☆ 23.11.22 Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★⯪☆ 18.3.20 Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★⯪☆ 13.10.21 Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★☆ 26.6.24 The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★⯪☆ 19.7.23 Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost Series II Black Badge ★★★★⯪ 25.6.25 Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.	4.5	3.6	2576	25.8	-
Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18 The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre ★★★★⯪ 20.12.23 Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20 Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★⯪ 19.7.17 Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR ★★★⯪☆ 2.12.20 Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★☆ 15.11.17 Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★☆☆ 25.10.23 Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★⯪ 9.2.22 Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★⯪☆ 31.7.19 Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20 Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ 29.1.25 A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24 The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★⯪☆ 30.1.19 Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★⯪ 19.3.25 Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21 Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium ★★★⯪☆ 8.11.23 Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium ★★★⯪☆ 15.5.24 Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★⯪☆ 28.2.24 Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★⯪☆ 27.9.23 A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23 A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT ★★★★⯪ 7.4.21 Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus ★★★★☆ 4.9.19 Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156

TOP 3

BEST DRIVER'S CARS

1 McLaren Artura

2 Analogue Supersport

3 Aston Martin Vantage

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Model 3 Long Range ★★★★☆ 14.2.24
Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.
4.4 3.4 1846 - 277

Model Y Long Range AWD ★★★★☆ 23.3.22
A far better electric car than a premium SUV.
4.7 3.6 1978 - 234

Model S P90D ★★★★⯪ 20.4.16
Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.
3.5 3.0 2220 - 214

Model S Plaid ★★★⯪☆ 2.8.23
Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.
2.4 1.7 2220 - 301

Model X 90D ★★★★☆ 15.2.17
High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.
5.2 4.2 2508 - 147

TOYOTA

Aygo X Limited Edition ★★★⯪☆ 11.5.22
A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.
15.6 16.5 974 58.7 -

Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design ★★★★☆ 23.9.20
Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.
9.2 8.8 1140 65.0 -

GR Yaris Circuit Pack ★★★★★ 3.3.21
Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.
5.2 5.0 1283 39.2 -

Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports ★★★★☆ 5.6.19
A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.
8.5 7.7 1537 52.6 -

Prius Plug-in Design ★★★★☆ 23.4.25
Better late than never for best Prius to date.
6.6 5.6 1542 56.1 46

bZ4X AWD Vision ★★★⯪☆ 18.1.23
A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.
6.4 5.9 2023 - 208

Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible ★★★★☆ 21.5.25
Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.
10.3 10.3 2503 30.7 -

Mirai Design Premium ★★★★☆ 16.6.21
Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.
8.7 8.3 1937 - -

GR Supra Pro ★★★★☆ 14.8.19
Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.
4.4 3.6 1495 39.0 -

Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport ★★★⯪☆ 1.3.23
Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.
10.0 9.5 2241 32.5 -

VAUXHALL

Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto ★★★⯪☆ 22.1.20
Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.
11.2 11.5 1171 51.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line ★★★⯪☆ 5.10.22
Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.
9.9 9.2 1304 55.3 -

Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite ★★★☆☆ 7.6.17
Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.
9.8 10.3 1278 54.2 -

Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto ★★★⯪☆ 12.5.21
The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.
9.3 9.1 1238 48.6 -

Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav ★★★☆☆ 22.4.20
Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.
- - 1800 - -

Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy ★★★⯪☆ 27.12.18
Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.
14.7 16.2 1552 60.1 -

VOLKSWAGEN

Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE ★★★★⯪ 31.1.18
Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.
10.7 11.2 1145 57.1 -

Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+ ★★★★☆ 1.8.18
A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.
6.7 5.9 1342 46.8 -

Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG ★★★★⯪ 22.7.20
Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.
8.3 7.8 1330 60.0 -

Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style ★★★★⯪ 23.10.24
New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.
7.2 6.1 1619 46.5 -

Golf GTI ★★★⯪☆ 25.9.24
'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.
5.3 4.4 - 47.2 -

Golf R ★★★★☆ 14.4.21
Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.
4.4 3.7 1520 43.9 -

ID 3 Pro Performance Life ★★★★☆ 31.3.21
Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.
7.0 6.5 1757 - 145

Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line ★★★⯪☆ 27.9.17
Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.
6.5 6.2 1866 55.6 -

Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake ★★★⯪☆ 9.6.21
Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.
7.1 6.0 1783 52.5 -

ID 7 Pro Match ★★★★⯪ 13.3.24
Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.
6.1 5.1 2162 - 239

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG ★★★★⯪ 24.1.18
Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.
6.7 6.5 1534 37.5 -

T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG ★★⯪☆☆ 10.6.20
It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.
- - 1540 - -

Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line ★★★⯪☆ 22.5.24
Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.
9.4 9.2 1606 44.9 -

ID 4 GTX Max ★★★⯪☆ 27.10.21
GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.
6.2 5.6 2220 - 200

Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech ★★★⯪☆ 8.8.18
An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.
7.2 6.6 2292 41.6 -

Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance ★★★⯪☆ 5.6.24
It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.
6.2 5.7 2446 34.1 26

Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG ★★★★☆ 3.2.16
A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.
9.9 9.7 1666 - -

Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style ★★★★☆ 8.3.23
Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.
8.4 7.1 2243 37.9 14

ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro ★★★★☆ 8.2.23
It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.
9.5 9.1 2498 - 185

Grand California 600 ★★★⯪☆ 2.1.20
Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.
15.8 16.7 3095 28.5 -

Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB ★★★☆☆ 30.3.22
Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.
9.1 9.0 2108 39.1 -

Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.
7.2 6.4 1836 44.5 73

VOLVO

EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus ★★★☆☆ 1.5.24
Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.
5.7 5.1 1779 - 179

C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 13.4.22
A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.
4.4 3.6 2172 - 194

XC40 D4 AWD First Edition ★★★★⯪ 7.2.18
Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.
8.5 8.5 1735 43.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

XC60 D4 AWD R-Design ★★★⯪☆ 5.7.17
The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.
8.9 8.9 1836 48.9 -

XC90 D5 AWD Momentum ★★★★☆ 17.6.15
A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.
8.3 8.3 2076 - -

V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto ★★★★☆ 27.6.18
Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.
8.9 8.3 1669 43.1 -

V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★⯪ 21.9.22
Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.
4.9 4.3 2036 38.0 51

V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★⯪ 11.11.20
Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.
5.6 4.9 2109 41.9 -

XPENG

G6 RWD Standard Range ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.25
Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.
6.8 6.2 2067 3.3 208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Nissan Leaf Early 2026
EV is still Sunderland-built but now a crossover. Shares its platform with the Ariya.

Omoda 7 November
Boxier version of the Omoda 5 will offer petrol and plug-in hybrid powertrains.

Ferrari F80 October
Limited-run hypercar gets 1184bhp from Formula 1-derived V6 and three electric motors.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
THE HUMBLE HATCHBACK

BY ILLYA VERPRAET

It was at once an unsatisfying and actually a very satisfying verdict for a group test. When I put the revised Volkswagen Golf against a pair of rivals in the Toyota Corolla and Peugeot 308 last August, the overarching conclusion was that all three were thoroughly recommendable.

There were a bunch of alternatives that I didn't include, simply because 10-car group tests are a logistical nightmare, but we could have brought the Mazda 3, the Honda Civic and the Ford Focus and the result would have been broadly the same.

You might conclude, then, that it doesn't matter which C-segment hatchback you pick, because they're all white goods. The opposite is true, though: in a world filled with slightly mediocre cars, here's a market segment that is still bursting at the seams with excellence.

Although SUVs and crossovers have asserted dominance in recent years, combustion-engined C-segment hatchbacks have been the bedrock of the European car market, selling in their millions. As such, manufacturers have invested money, time and effort into making them really good, and it shows.

In many ways, the C-segment hatchback is simply peak car – as if Goldilocks turned out to be an automotive engineer rather than a porridge-pilfering vagrant. They're just the right size for European roads: not so small that you feel like you're driving a Cozy Coupe and not so big that they're a struggle to park or squeeze down hedge-lined country lanes. You can just about fit a family in but you're not then lugging around a tonne of redundant metal when you drive it by yourself.

That rightness of size starts a virtuous circle. Because these cars are not excessively heavy or excessively tall, they don't need big engines to manage good performance. (The 148bhp petrol Golf does 0-62mph in 8.4sec. Do you really need more?) And because they don't have big engines, they can manage 50mpg without trying. Go for a diesel (if you can find one) or a hybrid and 70mpg could be within reach. Because there isn't all that much weight or height to control, the suspension can be fairly soft, which means that ride and handling needn't be a compromise: you can have tight body control and direct steering without the ride turning rough. It's all done with less than exotic components, which means they're not ridiculously expensive if they ever need replacing. Pair it with some 16in wheels with chunky tyres and you're really winning: pillowy ride comfort *and* cheap tyres. Talking about cheap: any hatchback is usually a few thousand pounds cheaper than the equivalent SUV.

Dream cars for almost nobody but ideal for pretty much everyone

Hatchbacks are smaller, lighter and cheaper than SUVs. Oh yeah, and better too

> **"If it were a new idea today, we would all go mad for it"**

Quietly great to drive, practical, economical and affordable: if the C-segment hatchback were introduced today as a new idea or product, we would all go mad for it and call it a game-changer. But because we have had the Golf for 50 years, the Corolla for 40 years and the Peugeot 306/308 for 30 years, familiarity has bred contempt. They are just seen as the standard, the thing that has always existed, the car your parents drove.

More practical than a saloon and more efficient and better to drive than an SUV, a hatchback is automotive bread and butter: hard to beat but not very fashionable. It's just in need of a sourdough moment now.

What we did this week

SUGAR RUSH

The Le Mans 24 Hours can be an energy-sapping grind, and not just for the teams. To help spectators in Aston Martin's hospitality unit make it through the night, shortly before 11pm the catering staff brought out a vast array of sweets, containing enough sugar to keep both you and your dentist up at night… **JAMES ATTWOOD**

WHEN I'M CLEANING WINDOWS

Ever encountered a rogue window washer at a red light? Be glad it wasn't one of the Peugeot Le Mans team's guys, who are seemingly paid to fling themselves at a hypercar to wipe away 24 hours' worth of bugs with sheer violence. A properly impressive effort. **CHARLIE MARTIN**

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

"Do you want to hold it?" asked our tour guide. The 'it' was Fernando Alonso's incredibly complex Formula 1 steering wheel that was about to be shipped to Italy for the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix. Yes, but no… Imagine dropping it! That would have set quite the tone for my interview with Aston Martin chairman Lawrence Stroll that followed. **MARK TISSHAW**

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THERE IS NO SECOND

Winning is a state of mind. It's that voice in your head that pushes you to be a better version of yourself. Victory becomes reality for those who dare to encounter the new CUPRA Terramar's shark nose design, sporty bucket seats, and coast-to-coast rear LED lights. For those who know that, no matter what they do, there is no second.

CUPRA

Official fuel consumption for the CUPRA Terramar range mpg (litres/100km) combined: 32.1 – 706.2 (8.8 - 0.4). Combined CO_2 emissions: 199-10g/km. Figures include the following models: CUPRA Terramar petrol and e-HYBRID. Plug-in e-HYBRID vehicles require mains electricity for charging. Figures for e-HYBRID vehicles were obtained using a combination of battery power and fuel. Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption, CO_2 and electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. Data correct as at March 2025.